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Ann Stewart Sledge

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**Measuring Teacher Effectiveness through Meaningful Evaluation:
How Can Reform Models Apply to General Education
and Special Education Teachers?**

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Measuring Teacher Effectiveness through Meaningful Evaluation:

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***and* Special Education Teachers?**

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to the teachers who so willingly shared with me the details of their daily work lives and their passion for helping students succeed. As I read the current body of research on the reform of teacher evaluations, I found that it rarely provides insight into the experiences and beliefs of practitioners. I wondered, “*What do the teachers think? How are these policies affecting them?*” In their recent publication, “Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers: What America’s Best Teachers Think about Teaching (2013),” The National Teacher Project (TNTP) explored the meaning of *teacher voice* by engaging in dialog with the nation’s best teachers. The authors stated, “Today, too little is known about the opinions and experiences of top-performing teachers, because researchers rarely focus specifically on them.” Sadly, this is true, but it is the hope of this researcher that, by engaging great teachers, they might be true partners with policymakers and decision makers in designing and modifying systems that lead to improved teaching practices and increased student achievement.

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**Measuring Teacher Effectiveness through Meaningful Evaluation:
How Can Reform Models Apply to General Education
and Special Education Teachers?**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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While teacher quality is recognized as a critical component in school reform, and the pursuit of new teacher evaluation systems has gained national attention, the question of whether proposed teacher assessment models meet the needs of special education teachers has gone largely unnoticed. Current efforts to design teacher evaluation processes that accurately distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers must take into account the difficulties of using new, innovative evaluation systems to appraise teachers who serve students with disabilities. Important differences in the roles, expertise, and circumstances in which special education teachers carry out their responsibilities result in challenges related to the use of observation protocols in evaluating instructional practices, obtaining valid measures of student progress, and understanding the relevance of teacher credentials (i.e., degrees earned and certification) in the special education setting. Through this qualitative research dissertation, the researcher sought to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special

education teachers and administrators to better understand (a) the relationship between teacher evaluation and teacher effectiveness; (b) the ways in which educators approach the challenges of applying teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers; and (c) the ways in which teacher evaluation processes support the professional growth and development of special education teachers.

Keywords: school reform, special education, students with disabilities, teacher effectiveness, teacher evaluation, value-added measures, co-teacher

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Building on America's history of economic and political dominance, and as a response to public opinion, accountability systems have placed enormous pressure on school leaders and educators to meet rising expectations to prepare students who are well equipped to lead the nation. Subsequently, tangible outcomes for *all* student populations are closely scrutinized (McLaughlin, Smith, & Wilkinson, 2012). Among these groups are students with disabilities, and the challenges they face in achieving academic success are evident in standardized test scores, graduation rates, enrollment in post-high school studies, and levels of adult employment (Altman, Vang, & Thurlow, 2012; Center on Education Policy [CEP], 2009; Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2011; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006). Reform efforts to improve student outcomes for students with disabilities must place quality instruction and the role of an effective teacher at the very center of its change strategy.

This chapter contains the context and statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, and the significance of the investigation. This is followed by the research questions, a brief explanation of the methodology, definition of terms, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research. Portions of this chapter have been previously published (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Context of the Problem

Despite the implementation of more inclusive instructional practices and greater numbers of students with disabilities being provided access to curriculum aligned to grade level standards, the achievement gap between special education students and general education students continues to persist (Altman et al., 2012; CEP, 2009; McLaughlin et al., 2012; NCES, 2009; Wagner et al., 2006). In 2009, the reported difference between the average reading scores of students in general education and those in special education was 35 points in fourth grade and 36 points in eighth grade; differences in math scores were even more dramatic, with an achievement gap of 21 points in fourth grade, and 58 points in eighth grade (NCES, 2009). Similarly, a longitudinal study of 11,000 youth who received special education services between 2001 and 2006 reported that 86% of students with disabilities scored below the mean on nationally normed assessments; 28% left high school before receiving their diploma; and, after leaving high school, just over 40% of students with disabilities were employed, compared to 63% of their non-disabled peers (Wagner et al., 2006).

The Role of an Effective Teacher

These statistics show that we must carefully examine the learning experiences of students with disabilities and to consider the effectiveness of the teachers who are responsible for their instruction. In the field of general education, the results of more than 15 years of research have demonstrated that an effective teacher, or a series of effective teachers, has the potential to make a positive impact on student academic gains such that achievement gaps can be significantly reduced or eliminated (Chetty, Friedman,

& Rockoff, 2012; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kane, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). In their longitudinal study that tracked one million children from fourth grade into adulthood, Chetty et al. concluded that not only does a highly effective teacher influence a student's immediate academic achievement, but also that students assigned to highly effective teachers are more likely to attend college, receive higher salaries, and experience a better quality of life than those who were assigned to the least-effective teachers. Darling-Hammond (2012) described the importance of teacher quality:

Educators know—and research confirms—that every aspect of school reform depends for its success on highly skilled teachers and principals, especially when the expectations of schools and the diversity of the student body increase. This may be the most important lesson learned in more than two decades of varied reforms to improve schools. Regardless of the efforts or initiative, teachers tip the scale toward success or failure. (p. 8)

Reform of Teacher Evaluation Systems

Understanding the importance of teacher effectiveness, educational policymakers and researchers have sought to determine what it means to be a *highly effective teacher* and to consider how to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn from a highly effective teacher. Specifically, they have sought to identify the teacher qualities related to increased student achievement and to create systems, including teacher evaluation models, that help to accurately identify effective teachers. Traditionally, effective teachers have not been identified through the use of teacher evaluation systems. In

addition, school leaders who are responsible for teacher evaluation have failed to differentiate among educators, with the result that the majority of teachers have received positive evaluations with little regard for their varying contributions to student achievement (Braun, 2005; Burdette, 2011a; Carey, 2004; Glazerman et al., 2010; Little, 2009; National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2011; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). For this reason, new, more effective performance evaluation systems that rely on multiple measures of teacher performance and take into account a teacher's impact on academic outcomes are now demanded (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Burdette, 2011b; Carey, 2004; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC] 2012b; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Glazerman et al., 2010; Goe, 2007; Little, 2009; Rivkin, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2009).

Metrics that quantify student progress or growth over time are generally referred to as *measures of student progress*. The most common of these measures, value-added measures, include various statistical models that use a student's prior test data to predict expected academic growth (Braun, 2005). The comparison of the student's actual growth to predicted growth is attributed to the teacher in the form of a value-added score. Importantly, value-added measures are used to assess student growth rather than student achievement, a distinction that allows, in theory, for equitable comparisons to be made among teachers regardless of the student populations they serve (Braun, 2005; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Incentives to redesign teacher evaluation systems were introduced in 2009, as the U.S. Department of Education [DOE] announced the availability of grant funds through

Race to the Top (RTT) initiatives, which required states to “design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers . . . that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories and that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor” (p. 34). Likewise, the U.S. DOE (2010) offered grant funds that would reward states and school districts for implementing reforms that would identify top-performing teachers “based in significant part on student growth” (p. 1).

To be eligible for these federal monies, states moved quickly to revamp their policies related to teacher evaluation (Ahearn, 2009; NCTQ, 2011, 2012.) Within three years of the announcement of RTT funds, 36 states and the District of Columbia overhauled their teacher evaluations systems, including 30 states that incorporated measures of student progress as a significant factor in determining a teacher’s overall assessment rating (NCTQ, 2012).

Despite the changes in state policies and the general support among educators for the value and importance of identifying effective teachers in terms of their impact on student success, the actual implementation of value-added models has been carried out amid much debate. Leading researchers, as well as practitioners, have cautioned that the use of value-added measures in teacher evaluation models may have unintended consequences, due to their reliance on standardized test scores, the variability in teacher scores from year to year, the difficulty of separating teacher effects from those of the campus, and challenges related to data quality control (Braun, 2005; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Corcoran, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Glazerman et al., 2010; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; IES, 2012; Mead, Rotherham, & Brown, 2012; Papay, 2010).

New Approaches to Teacher Evaluation

As traditional measures of teacher performance are being replaced, reformers insist that new, innovative models be used to accurately and credibly assess teacher quality. The design and implementation of new teacher evaluation systems must incorporate multiple measures of teacher performance that include measures of student progress and are grounded in research (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Goe & Little, 2010; Little, 2009; NCTQ, 2012; Weisberg et al., 2009). In her extensive research synthesis of teacher quality and the link to student outcomes, Goe (2007) described these components of teacher quality: (a) teacher inputs, such as teacher qualifications and characteristics; (b) processes, such as the planning and delivery of lessons; and (c) outcomes, including measures of student academic growth.

Accordingly, investigators have sought to assess the relationship between teacher inputs and student achievement (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Goe, 2007; Kane & Rockoff, 2007; Sindelar, Daunic, & Rennells, 2004). In addition, researchers of large- and small-scale studies have sought to link processes, such as the planning and delivery of lessons, to improved student outcomes (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Goe, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Kimball, White, Milanowski, & Borman, 2004; Milanowski, 2011; Odden, Borman, & Fermanich, 2004; Pianta & Hamre, 2009; Sindelar, Espin, Smith, & Harriman, 1990). Finally, researchers have applied value-added models and other measures of student progress to measure a teacher's impact on student academic growth (Chetty et al., 2012; Goe, 2007; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Applicability of Reform Models for Special Education Teachers

In 2012, the U.S. DOE reported that approximately 6.5 million students with disabilities received services (NCES, 2012). The academic success for these students depends on quality instruction delivered by a highly effective teacher—that is, very often, a highly effective *special education teacher*. Feng and Sass (2010) stated, “The logical starting point for any policy to address the achievement of students with disabilities is the quality of teachers instructing special education students” (p. 2). Confirming the importance of special education teachers and the value of an effective teacher evaluation system, the CEC (2012b) recommended that evaluation models for special education teachers accurately reflect the diverse roles of the special education teacher, measure the effective implementation of evidence-based practices, and include reliable indicators of the special education teacher’s impact on academic growth. The difficulty, however, has been that, “Precious little is known about the effect of teacher quality on the ability of teachers to promote achievement and enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities” (Feng & Sass, 2010, p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

Teacher quality is being redefined in terms of value-added research (Chetty et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2008; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), recommendations for new teacher evaluation policies, (Bill & Melinda Gates, 2010; Burdette, 2011b; Carey, 2004; CEC, 2012b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Glazerman et al., 2010; Goe, 2007; Little, 2009; NCTQ, 2011, 2012; Weisberg, et al., 2009), and incentives for the implementation of reform models (U.S. DOE, 2009, 2010). The words *special education*,

however, are seldom found in these reports (Brownell, Billingsley, McLeskey, & Sindelar, 2012). Efforts to study teacher quality and to reform teacher evaluation systems have typically been guided by the roles and responsibilities of general education teachers, often ignoring the differences in the roles and responsibilities, as well as the skills and expertise required of special education teachers (Brownell et al., 2012; Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010).

The differences, however, between general education and special education teachers are evident in several important ways. First, the unique skills and specialized expertise required of special educators are delineated in the preparation and credentialing process, as described by The Advanced Preparation Standards (CEC, 2012a).

Additionally, time studies have demonstrated the wide range of tasks for which special education teachers are responsible (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Practitioners also have confirmed the differences unique to special education teachers. In their survey of 1,100 state and district special education administrators, Holdheide et al. (2010) reported that the majority of respondents agreed that the knowledge, skills, and expertise of special education teachers are distinct from that of general education teachers. These differences are exacerbated by the great variability in the roles assumed by special education teachers, the heterogeneous population of students they serve, and the expectation that each student's instructional plan is highly individualized (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014a).

Collectively, these issues point to the challenge of identifying a single evaluation system appropriate to the wide array of teaching environments and student populations

served through special education. Researchers question whether measures of teacher quality that are used to evaluate general education teachers can be used effectively to evaluate special education teachers, including the use of teacher observation protocols (Frudden & Manatt, 1986; Holdheide et al., 2010; Katims & Henderson, 1990; Moya & Gay, 1982), value-added measures (Ahearn, 2009; Brownell et al., 2012; Burdette, 2011a, 2011b; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide, Browder, Warren, Buzick, & Jones, 2012; Holdheide et al., 2010), and teacher certification (Carlson, Lee, & Schroll Westat, 2004; Feng & Sass, 2010; Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004). Holdheide et al. (2010) summarized the dilemma, noting, “Few systems have the capacity to differentiate among specialty area educators, address the challenges in accurately measuring achievement growth for their students, and connect that growth to teacher effects” (p. 1).

Until now, research in the field of teacher quality, as it relates to special education, has often focused on pre-service preparation, certification, and content knowledge, with less attention focused on what happens to teachers after they enter the profession (Brownell et al., 2009; Boe et al., 2007; Nougaret et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004). In some cases, earlier studies were able to assess the efficacy of special education *programs*, yet “none of them investigates the role that *teachers* play in promoting the achievement of students with disabilities” (Feng & Sass, 2010, p. 7). Research reports and policy recommendations for the reform of teacher evaluation systems have focused almost exclusively on general education teachers, leading the Council for Exceptional Children (2012b) to state, “There is no consensus and almost no research about how these

teachers [special education teachers] might be evaluated” (p. 2). Similarly, Brownell et al. (2012) described the challenges, stating, “Unfortunately, there is little to guide states and districts as they consider evaluating special educators . . . as a field, we have limited research identifying the dimensions of teacher quality in special education” (p. 272).

Regrettably, current reform models for teacher evaluation have not been validated with special education teachers, and they have not been designed to adequately take into account the unique nature of the special education setting. Even two years after the CEC published its recommendations, there remains little agreement among states as to how they might best address the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers; further, the empirical research base is non-existent (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014b).

Purpose of the Study

Policymakers and advocates of special education point to a need to consider how reform models of teacher evaluation can fairly and accurately assess special education teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators on two middle school campuses located in a district that has implemented a reformed teacher evaluation system. The researcher examined participants’ views of how the teacher evaluation system identifies effective special education teachers, the ways in which administrators and teachers approach the challenges of applying teacher evaluation systems to the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, and teacher evaluation processes that support the professional growth and development of special education teachers.

Significance of the Study

To increase academic achievement for students with disabilities, the instructional practices of special education teachers must improve. Current research-based initiatives intended to overhaul teacher evaluation systems have focused on the improvement of general education teachers but have not fully taken into account the unique needs and responsibilities of the approximately 450,000 special education teachers in the United States. In the absence of teacher evaluation systems that are thoughtfully designed to address the unique challenges related to evaluating special education teachers, it is possible that new designs will fail to accomplish their intended goal of improved teaching performance and increased student achievement.

Current, relevant research is critical in the design of tools and processes that take into account (a) the specific roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and the ways that these differ from general education teachers; (b) the relative importance of the various roles taken by special education teachers; (c) the subtle differences in lesson delivery, observation, and feedback that are critical to success in the special education classroom; (d) the challenges of applying a traditional observation protocol in the various special education settings; and (e) the difficulties in identifying measures of student outcomes. In addition, the research must inform practitioners in how to best support the professional growth and development of special education teachers. If the tools and processes of the teacher evaluation system do not capture the nuances of the special education setting, the system may not be well-suited to support the growth of these educators, a critical need for teachers in all stages of their career, but especially important

given the number of novice teachers who are entering the profession. Finally, as many school districts rely on performance evaluations for contract and tenure decisions, the importance of a fair and credible system that meets the needs of general education and special education teachers cannot be underestimated.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?
2. How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?
3. How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

Overview of the Methodology

This qualitative study used a case study design to investigate the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in the use of teacher evaluation systems. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allows the participants to describe their everyday experiences as they occur naturally in the workplace and to reveal their realities and beliefs (Mertens, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Teacher evaluation systems tend to focus on process and are, by nature, complex; therefore, it was appropriate to use a qualitative approach for this topic.

For this investigation, using a case study approach allowed the researcher to focus on specific content, collect data in a naturally occurring environment, and make use of multiple sources of data within a bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Willis,

2007). In this investigation, the bounded system consisted of the special education teachers and administrators on two campuses that have demonstrated academic success for students with disabilities in a school district that has implemented teacher evaluation reform. Participants in this study were selected through purposeful, convenience sampling.

Data was collected through interviews, a review of documents, and observations conducted by the researcher. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Definition of Terms

Co-teach Model. An instructional model in which a general educator and a special educator share the responsibilities for planning and teaching to address the needs of all students (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Human Capital Systems. A strategic approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets, i.e., the people who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of the organization's objectives (Strategic Management of Human Capital, 2009).

Measures of student progress. A metric that is used to measure academic growth in an individual student from year to year (NCTQ, 2012).

Performance management. An ongoing process of communicating and clarifying roles and responsibilities, priorities, and expectations between supervisors and their employees to more closely align and evaluate the day-to-day work of employees with the organization's purpose and goals.

Teacher effectiveness. The degree to which a teacher positively influences student achievement (Goe, 2007).

Teacher evaluation systems. The process of identifying and measuring the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers based on an agreed-upon set of competencies and carried out for the purpose of differentiating performance, providing formative and summative feedback to guide professional growth, making personnel decisions, and maximizing resources (Weisberg et al., 2009).

Teacher observation protocols. Systematic classroom observations carried out by a peer or supervisor in which the observer assesses discrete teaching behaviors using standardized procedures. A teacher observation protocol specifies the behaviors to be observed and how the behaviors are to be recorded, and allows for inferences regarding the quality of the observed teaching behaviors (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

Teacher quality. A holistic description of a teacher's overall success, including teacher qualifications, teacher characteristics, instructional practices, and impact on student achievement (Goe, 2007).

Value-added measures. A metric designed to calculate the educational value that the school or classroom teacher adds to student achievement over time by comparing the actual growth in student learning to the predicted growth, based on the students' prior academic performance (Carey, 2004).

Delimitations

This study focused only on teachers and administrators of students with disabilities on two middle school campuses. Only schools that had a minimum of 25

special education students, a 70% passing rate or better on annual state assessments, and participation rates of 90% or more for two of the last three years for which data were available were considered for participation.

Limitations

This study intended to provide a description of the daily experiences and perceptions of those individuals who are involved in implementing teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers. The generalizability of the findings are limited due to the small sample size and the nature of qualitative research design (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Although the participants' interviews provided rich insight into their experiences, they relied on the individuals' self-reflection and ability to describe experiences and perceptions. An individual's perception is open to subjectivity, which may hinder a clear accounting of their experiences and may affect the interpretation of the results. Therefore, reliance on these perceptions also presented a limitation.

School sites for this research were identified through state assessment results for students with disabilities on these campuses. There are limitations in the use of state assessment results in identifying successful programs that serve students with disabilities. Specifically, many students with disabilities do not participate in state testing, a wide range of disabilities may be found on a particular campus, instructional settings may affect student success, teaching personnel may have changed since the results were achieved, and cohorts of students may have varying rates of success.

A final important limitation is the role of the researcher as a primary instrument of qualitative studies (Mertens, 2010). As such, it is possible that the researcher who is responsible for gathering and interpreting the data brings potential biases to the process, and other researchers might draw different conclusions based on the same findings.

Assumptions

There are several underlying assumptions in this case study. First, the researcher assumed that schools that have demonstrated success in improving academic achievement for students with disabilities were implementing effective teaching practices. Second, the researcher assumed that the special education teachers and administrators in the study participated in regular performance management practices, including teacher evaluation and classroom observation. In addition, the researcher assumed that the special education administrators had the tools and expertise to identify effective teachers. Finally, the researcher assumed that the educators who participated in the study provided honest and forthright answers to interview questions (Appendix A) and were sincere in all interactions with the researcher.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, a brief description of the methodology, and an explanation of the significance of the study. This chapter also includes delimitations as well as limitations for the research design. Chapter 2 presents literature in the areas of teacher evaluation systems as they apply to both general education and special education teachers. Chapter 3 presents the research design and

methods used to conduct the study as well as an explanation of the processes used to collect and analyze the data. Results and findings are provided in Chapter 4, and the discussion, conclusions, and implications are contained in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature related to school reform efforts built on human capital initiatives and, more specifically, the search to develop and implement more effective teacher evaluation systems. The design and development of the components of improved teacher evaluation systems is described, as well as the challenges related to applying these measures to both general education and special education teachers; the vignette below serves as an introduction. The chapter then presents the role of human capital systems to ensure teacher quality, followed by a description of the growing body of research related to teacher evaluation systems. Then, the challenges related to applying measures of teacher effectiveness to general education and special education teachers are presented. Next are recommendations and research on ways to address the challenges of effectively evaluating special education teachers. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Mr. Boyer is the assistant principal of a middle school in a large metropolitan center in a southern state. It is early morning, and he is reviewing his schedule for the day. He has planned to visit classrooms to complete both formal evaluations and informal walk-throughs for several teachers. First on the list is Ms. Marsh, who teaches sixth grade social studies. She provides instruction for the same grade and content area all day, so finding a time to visit her class is relatively easy. The observation and feedback cycle are part of the instructional coaching cycle for all teachers. Ms. Marsh has identified two areas in which she hopes to improve this year, i.e., differentiation and

ratio of teacher talk to student talk. Last week, Ms. Marsh expressed her satisfaction that the regular feedback sessions with Mr. Boyer have provided her with valuable insight into the ways she can grow and improve her professional practice.

Also on the list for today is Mr. Johnson, a special education teacher whose daily schedule includes instruction for a group of students who are in a small group “pull-out” for math in the resource room from 8:00 to 9:15. Then, Mr. Johnson serves as a co-teacher in a science class, where he provides support for two students who need accommodations and off-level texts to complete assignments and prepare for tests. A meeting with the educational diagnostician during the middle of the day will be held to review recent assessment results for a student who continues to struggle in reading and math. In addition, Mr. Johnson will be completing paperwork for two upcoming parent meetings and will finish the day by consulting with the eighth grade team about a special-needs student who has been diagnosed as autistic and is struggling to participate successfully in classroom interactions and small-group work. The teachers have requested Mr. Johnson’s assistance in revising the student’s behavior plan.

Mr. Boyer looks again at the protocol he follows to evaluate the two teachers. Even though they are both middle school teachers, their responsibilities are very different. The expertise needed by Mr. Johnson to work with students with disabilities, as well as the variety of responsibilities he is assigned, cause Mr. Boyer to question whether the observation protocol and measures of student progress that are used to determine a teacher’s evaluation rating are equally valid for both Ms. Marsh and Mr. Johnson, but there is little time for questioning. The bell rings to signal the start of the school day.

Recognizing Teacher Quality

School systems are highly dependent on human capital. The knowledge and expertise of each individual in an organization, as well as the collective knowledge and expertise of the employees, are an organization's greatest resource. In particular, teacher quality is critical to the success of the educational organization, yet quality is dependent on well-developed competencies that will differ widely from teacher to teacher. A human capital approach aligns the systems and processes of human resources to the organization's core mission; it connects the need for talented teachers with the goal of increased student achievement (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2009).

Managing Human Capital

Improving human capital systems is a key component of current school reform. School districts recognize that they must invest in talented teachers. Their organizational success is dependent on a selection process that either identifies individuals with talent and skills to positively influence student achievement or identifies those who have the capacity to develop these skills. Moreover, school districts must provide professional learning experiences that result in improved teacher performance and must establish systems that encourage the retention of the most effective teachers, which TNTP (2012) referred to as *irreplaceables*. It is critical that state and local education agencies focus their efforts toward the recruitment, training, compensation, and staffing of schools with a high-quality workforce.

Effective human capital systems are based on core assumptions, including the belief that the organization hires individuals who possess, or can develop, identified

competencies; provides carefully planned opportunities for professional growth; and expects employees to take responsibility for professional development such that the organization will support their development but will not guarantee continued employment. In addition, the hiring organization provides compensation and rewards that are suited to the employees' needs and preferences and holds managers accountable for the performance of their teams. Retaining top performers is an important goal of the organization, and the executive level team leads the organization in implementing effective performance management systems (Lawler, 2008).

The functions of a human capital system include (a) recruitment, (b) selection, (c) induction, (d) mentoring, (e) professional development, (f) performance management, and (g) compensation (Lawler, 2008). Each of these functions is aligned to performance competencies and performance assessment. If we are to create human capital systems that ensure a quality teaching force, we must begin by accurately identifying the performance competencies that are aligned to the most important goal of the organization, i.e., academic achievement. In schools, an effective human capital system aligns core performance competencies to performance assessments and ensures that these assessments are useful in identifying teachers who possess the behaviors and skills that result in improved student outcomes. Human capital theory purports that, when these systems are in place and are aligned to the human resource functions, the organization is positioned to achieve its intended mission. Figure 1 illustrates how the human capital approach is designed, with performance competencies as the organizing principle.



Figure 1. Strategic human capital management in education. Adapted from “Talent Management in Education: The Essence of the Strategic Management of Human Capital,” from *Strategic Management of Human Capital* (2009).

Teacher Effectiveness and Teacher Evaluation

Intuitively, we have known for many years that teacher quality affects student outcomes. Although it has been difficult to quantify the impact of teacher quality on student outcomes, advances in technology, the widespread use of standardized tests, and academic research of the last two decades have suggested that this can be done. Beginning in the early 1990s, some states established extensive databases that made it possible to track student progress on state assessments. Not only could researchers study

student achievement, they also could track cohorts of students from year to year and study their academic growth. In addition, these databases made it possible to match individual students to their teachers and to analyze the impact of these teachers over time (Braun, 2005; Carey, 2004).

Teacher Effectiveness Defined through Value-added Models

In 1996, Sanders and Rivers (1996) used the state database of student assessment results to create the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, a statistical model used to determine an individual teacher's influence on the rate of academic growth for students assigned to him or her. The authors, who tracked the academic progress of students from two metropolitan school systems from second through fifth grade, revealed that students who began at the same level of performance progressed at very different rates. Those students who experienced three years of learning with the most-effective teachers increased their achievement by 52 to 54 percentage points more than did those students who began at the same achievement level but experienced three years of learning with the least-effective teachers. Sanders and Rivers concluded that student achievement can be improved through "the development and implementation of strategies which will lead to improved teacher effectiveness" (p. 6). Further, they specifically named formative teacher evaluation as a means to accomplish this goal.

With the advent of annual assessments, the use of standardized tests, and the technology to store and analyze large numbers of student records, researchers possessed the tools and conditions to do what had not previously been possible. The *value-added* system provided a means to measure the contribution that a particular district, school, or

teacher makes toward student learning, i.e., the value added to students' academic progress in the course of a school year. These measures are not based on student *achievement*, but, rather, on student *growth* (Braun, 2005; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). A value-added score is calculated using complex mathematical formulas that utilize prior student performance data to predict future academic performance on standardized assessments. A comparison of actual student outcomes to predicted student outcomes is used to determine the value-added score. A teacher whose students achieve better-than-predicted progress receives a higher value-added score than does a teacher whose students attain less-than-predicted academic growth (Carey, 2004).

Spurred by the implications of value-added research, Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kane (2005) conducted further investigations using similar models and attempted to answer the following questions: (a) Are there systematic differences between schools and teachers in their abilities to raise achievement? (b) How important are differences in teacher quality as related to student outcomes? and (c) Are student outcomes affected significantly by factors such as class size, teacher education, and teacher experience? The results caused educators to take notice.

Based on a longitudinal data set that included more than a half million students in over 3,000 schools in Texas, Rivkin et al. (2005) found a significant difference among teachers in terms of their impact on student achievement. These differences in teacher effectiveness were so significant that they "could substantially offset disadvantages associated with low socioeconomic background" (p. 419). The authors concluded that

teacher effectiveness was *the most important factor* that influenced student gains and that teacher effectiveness was not related to advanced degrees, years of experience, or a reduction in class size. Further, the authors noted that these findings had important implications for personnel practices, stating, “The substantial differences in quality among those with similar observable backgrounds highlight the importance of effective hiring, firing, mentoring, and promotion practices” (p. 450) and concluded by describing prevailing personnel practices as “very imperfect” (p. 450).

Teacher Effectiveness Defined through New Teacher Evaluation Systems

The growing body of research related to teacher effectiveness, as defined by student outcomes, brought to light the wide variances in teacher quality and the lack of alignment between traditional human resource practices and the school district’s goal of improved student achievement. Historically, these differences in teacher quality have gone largely unnoticed. These differences, however, as well as our failure to recognize them, were described in *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009). Based on their extensive research, which included 15,000 teachers in 12 districts and four states, Weisberg et al. demonstrated a telling educational reality, namely, that poor performers have been ignored and effective teachers have been left unrecognized.

Weisberg et al. (2009) documented the ways in which current evaluation systems have failed to differentiate among educators, resulting in the majority of teachers’ receiving positive evaluations, with little regard for their varying contributions to student success. The *widget effect* refers to the authors’ conclusion that most school administrators evaluate teachers as though they were equally effective, similar to widget-

like automatons that could be easily interchanged. In effect, the authors purport that administrators fail to recognize and support teachers' individual differences and that the majority of administrators fail to deliver frequent, specific, and rigorous feedback. Consequently, teachers have rarely been provided the coaching and support needed for professional growth.

Weisberg et al. (2009) recommended the design and implementation of comprehensive performance evaluation systems that are fair and accurate measures of a teacher's effectiveness in promoting student achievement. Further, teachers should be evaluated based on their ability to fulfill their core responsibility as professionals (i.e., delivering instruction that results in student learning). Administrators who use evaluation systems also must delineate clear performance standards, make use of multiple rating options, adhere to regular norming practices, and deliver frequent feedback to teachers. In addition, teacher evaluation systems must be aligned to performance standards that are linked to differentiated professional development opportunities.

With the release of *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009), the growing national discussion related to human capital initiatives, including the need for more effective teacher evaluation systems, was intensified. In response, the National Education Association sponsored a review of five teacher evaluation systems and provided a summary of the research to assess their effectiveness (Little, 2009). These systems, which were perceived as “innovative and comprehensive approaches to educational reform” (p. vii), included common elements that made explicit links between various components, including (a) the evaluation process; (b) curriculum standards; (c)

professional development; (d) support for struggling teachers; and (e) personnel decisions. The creators of these systems gained credibility with teachers and administrators by involving multiple stakeholders in their design and ongoing development.

In addition, these systems employed evaluation measures that were aligned to widely accepted instructional practices and were believed to be robust enough to capture a broad range of teaching behaviors. Interestingly, only one of the five systems included measures of student outcomes as a component. Little (2009) summarized the benefits and challenges related to this more controversial element of teacher evaluation reform and cautioned that the success of implementing measures of student progress into teacher evaluation systems would be dependent on our commitment to “involve teachers in deciding how to account for student learning and other relevant outcomes . . . so teachers feel that they are being evaluated comprehensively and fairly” (p. 16).

Incentives for New Teacher Evaluation Systems

Incentives to redesign teacher evaluation systems were introduced in 2009, as the U.S. DOE announced the availability of grant funds through RTT initiatives, which required states to “design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers . . . that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories and that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor” (p. 34). Likewise, the U.S. DOE (2010) offered grant funds to reward states and school districts for implementing reforms that would identify top-performing teachers “based in significant part on student growth” (p. 1).

In 2011, the NCTQ recommended that all states adopt teacher evaluation systems in which evidence of student gains is the most significant criterion in determining the teacher's performance rating. In addition, the NCTQ advocated for comprehensive human capital reforms to include annual evaluations of all teachers and professional development aligned to teacher evaluations. They stated, "Stakeholder input is important—but bold leadership is even more important" (p. iii), and "Teacher effectiveness measures don't have to be perfect to be useful" (p. ii).

States moved quickly to redesign their policies related to teacher evaluation. Between 2009 and 2012, 36 states and the District of Columbia revised state policies (NCTQ, 2012). Of those, 30 states incorporated measures of student progress into their teacher evaluation systems, of which 20 states required that student achievement be a significant factor in evaluating teacher performance. In addition, the NCTQ recommended that (a) reliable state wide data systems that link students to teachers of record are established; (b) all teachers are evaluated every year using a rating system with multiple categories; (c) student outcomes are the most important factor in determining teacher effectiveness, making use of multiple measures of student learning; (d) classroom observation protocols are aligned to key teaching behaviors and that evaluators are well trained in their use; (e) meaningful, actionable feedback is provided to teachers; and (f) evaluations are used to inform personnel decisions and licensure.

As the pace and intensity of incorporating measures of student progress into teacher evaluation systems continued to accelerate, additional, compelling research was published in support of value-added measures. Chetty et al. (2012) reported their

findings from a comprehensive, longitudinal study. They tracked one million children from fourth grade into adulthood to evaluate the accuracy of value-added measures to capture teacher impact on student academic success and future earnings. The authors demonstrated that value-added measures accurately reflected the impact of a teacher's effectiveness and that students assigned to teachers with high value-added scores were more likely to attend college, have increased earnings, and enjoy a better quality of life than were those students assigned to teachers with low value-added scores. The impact of high-value-added teachers was similar for students from low- and high-income families, demonstrating that a teacher's impact has the potential to overcome the disadvantages of poverty.

Designing Research-based Models for New Teacher Evaluation Systems

If traditional measures of teacher performance have not proven to be reliable indicators of teacher effectiveness, and if we seek to design new, more effective teacher evaluation systems, i.e., evaluation systems that incorporate measures of student progress as a significant component, we must ensure that we have identified the performance competencies that are correlated to student achievement and that the new evaluation systems are designed to include a combination of measures that are fair and reliable indicators of a teacher's effectiveness.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) sought to study these issues through a project that would “establish which teaching practices, skills, and knowledge positively impact student learning” (p. 1). The intent of the project was to capture the full range of responsibilities and contexts in which teachers do their work. The research team

collected information from more than 3,000 teachers over a two-year period and reviewed multiple data sources on student performance, video-based classroom observations, evaluations of teachers' content knowledge and their ability to recognize student misunderstandings, student survey data, and the teachers' own perceptions of the school-based support they receive.

Preliminary findings from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) study presented a positive relationship between effective instructional practices and observation protocols when the observation protocols are used with fidelity and are accompanied by careful training and norming procedures. In addition, the authors concluded that reliability in identifying effective teachers can be increased through a combination of measures. For example, linking teacher observation ratings obtained from a series of classroom visits with value-added scores and student perceptions resulted in a more reliable measure of effectiveness than did using a single measure. A final conclusion of the research team was that an evaluation system does not reach its true potential unless it is used as a tool to support teachers in their professional growth and development.

Taking a different approach to link teacher quality and student outcomes, Goe (2007) compiled a comprehensive research synthesis of more than 50 studies. Based on her analysis of the many ways that researchers have measured teacher quality, Goe developed a framework to illustrate these distinct ways to look at teacher quality:

1. Teacher qualifications and characteristics are considered “inputs,” as they describe the resources that teachers bring with them as a result of who they are and the qualifications they have for entering the profession.

2. Teacher practices are considered “processes,” as they focus on what happens in the classroom and how instructional practices are linked to student learning.
3. Teacher effectiveness is considered an “outcome,” as it is determined by student progress on standardized achievement tests.

This model makes a distinction between *teacher quality*, a general term used to describe the degree to which a teacher is successful in the classroom, and *teacher effectiveness*, a term that is directly tied to student academic gains. Figure 2 illustrates how the components of an effective teacher evaluation system are designed to define teacher quality. These components include inputs, processes, and outcomes.

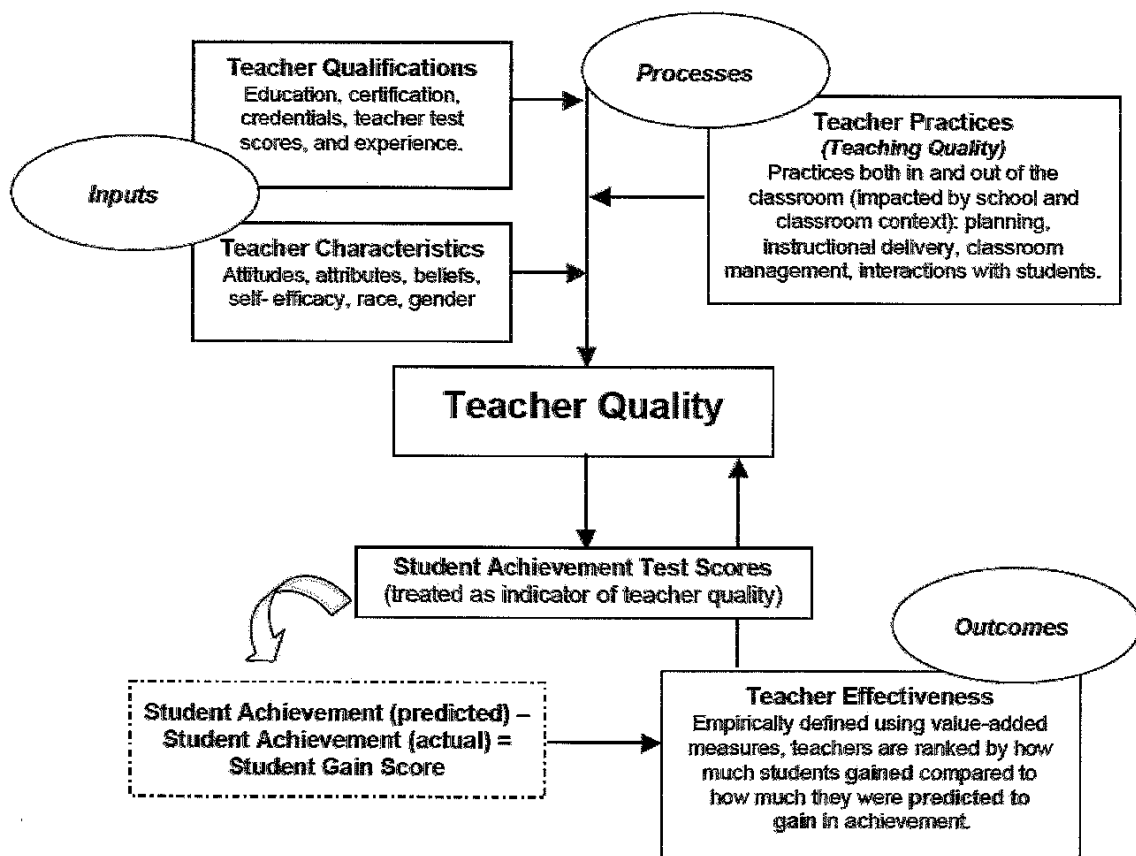


Figure 2. Graphic representation of a framework for teacher quality. Adapted from “The Link between Teacher Quality and Student Outcomes: A Research Synthesis” authored by Laura Goe (2007), published by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, and sponsored by the U.S. DOE.

Absence of Consideration for Special Education Teachers in Designing New Teacher Evaluation Systems

The inadequacies of current teacher evaluation systems, as well as the possibility of implementing more comprehensive and meaningful processes for assessing teacher quality, became widely known through the publication of value-added research, the release of reports such as *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009), the *MET Project* (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010), and the introduction of RTT incentives. Yet,

the words *special education* are seldom found in these reports (Brownell et al., 2012). In their comprehensive review, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation aimed to “provide a new knowledge base for practitioners and policymakers” (p. 4) but made no mention of teachers who serve students with disabilities. Likewise, applications for RTT funds required that states that implemented teacher evaluation systems incorporate measures of student progress into their assessments, but they made no distinction between general and special education teachers (NCTQ, 2011, 2012). The summaries included extensive recommendations for suggested changes in teacher evaluation policies, as well as a thorough state-by-state update on the policy changes that have taken place, yet they barely mentioned special education or the approximately 450,000 special education teachers who instruct students with disabilities (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2010).

In a 2011 joint project, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the U.S. DOE’s Office of Special Education Programs investigated the question of how new state policies for teacher evaluation systems would apply to special education teachers (Burdett, 2011b). Among the 30 states that implemented new teacher evaluation systems, 10 reported that the state policies would allow for differentiation for special education teachers but provided no details on what the differentiation would entail or how measures of student progress would be incorporated into the evaluation of special education teachers. Among the 10 states that were in the planning process at the time of the report, none had plans to allow for differentiation.

The NCTQ, in partnership with the CEC, advocated the need to consider how new teacher evaluation systems would apply to teachers who work with students with special

needs. Together, they set out to (a) identify the difficulties of evaluating special education and English language learner (ELL) specialists; (b) explore state and local policies, as well as present practices in evaluating teachers of at-risk populations; and (c) offer examples of promising practices (Holdheide et al., 2010). Survey results were gathered from 1,100 state and district special education directors, and the researchers conducted in-depth inquiries with selected respondents. A majority of the respondents (72%) reported that their state and local district teacher evaluation did not allow for a different or modified evaluation system that was tailored specifically for special education teachers. Significantly, half (50%) of the survey respondents stated that they did not believe that special education teachers and general education teachers should be evaluated with the same system. Holdheide et al. cited critical challenges related to evaluating special education teachers, such as the difficulty in measuring student progress, limited literature related to evaluating special education teachers, and the lack of research that links specific teaching behaviors to improved student achievement.

Until now, very little research has been carried out related to the challenges of identifying the competencies that describe an effective special education teacher and linking teacher behaviors to academic gains for students with disabilities. Research in the field of teacher quality, as it relates to special education, has focused primarily on pre-service preparation, certification, and content knowledge (Boe et al., 2007; Brownell et al., 2009; Nougaret et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004). While investigators have previously assessed the efficacy of special education *programs*, according to Feng and Sass (2012), “None of them investigates the role that *teachers* play in promoting the

achievement of students with disabilities” (p. 7). Recent reports, policy briefs, and investigations that describe new, more effective teacher evaluation systems have focused almost exclusively on general education teachers, such that, according to Brownell et al. (2012), “Researchers do not understand if these systems can effectively assess the nuances of special education teachers” (p. 273).

Applying Measures of Teacher Effectiveness to General Education and Special Education Teachers

Roles and Responsibilities

As is true for all human capital initiatives, the metrics used to develop fair and reliable systems to evaluate teacher performance must be grounded in a clear understanding of the professional roles and responsibilities that teachers are expected to perform. Although there are many similarities in the responsibilities of both general education and special education teachers, there are also several important differences. For example, special education teachers are typically asked to collaborate between general education teachers and other special education service providers, communicate regularly with parents beyond what is expected in general education, develop and provide oversight in the implementation of a student’s individualized education program (IEP), possess knowledge of special education laws and policies, and supervise paraprofessionals (Brownell et al., 2012).

The skills and expertise required of special educators are delineated in the preparation and credentialing process. The CEC (2012a) has identified the knowledge and skills required of both novice and experienced special educators, including: (a)

assessment; (b) curricular content knowledge; (c) programs, services, and outcomes; (d) research and inquiry; (e) leadership and policy; (f) professional and ethical practice; and (g) collaboration. In addition, these skills and knowledge are supplemented with specialty sets that make unique distinctions in content, context, and issues among the various areas of expertise, such as early childhood disabilities, developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and others (CEC, 2012a).

The differences between general education and special education teachers also are evident in their use of time. Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) carried out time-use studies with special education teachers. Their results provided evidence of the wide range of tasks for which they are responsible, including direct instruction (16%), instructional support (15%), paperwork (12%), student discipline (7%), supervision (7%), consulting and collaboration (8%), personal time (9%), and other responsibilities (8%). Among these various responsibilities, the activity most closely associated with a typical teacher, i.e., direct instruction, is only 16% of the special education teacher's day. It also should be noted that these percentages represent the median amount of time devoted to the various activities and that extreme scores were reported, evidence of the variations in time use among special education teachers.

Practitioners also confirmed the unique role of special educators, as demonstrated in survey responses from 1,100 state and district special education administrators. Holdheide et al. (2010) reported that the majority of respondents (84%) agreed that special educators must possess knowledge, skills, and expertise that are distinct from general education teachers. An important difference between special education teachers

and general education teachers is in the type and degree of specialization that is required to educate students with disabilities. Special education teachers must, for instance, possess expertise in dealing with the unique characteristics of various disabilities of students, disabilities that often manifest themselves differently in various students. These teachers are expected to provide individualized instruction for students with disabilities, teach appropriate social skills, manage difficult behaviors, provide personal care, and demonstrate sensitivity to the challenges that students with disabilities may face (Sindelar et al., 2004).

Another way in which the roles and responsibilities of general education and special education teachers differ is in the instructional strategies they employ. While there are many instances in which their practices are similar, there are also times when differentiated instructional methods are needed to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities. Among these practices, evidence-based strategies are a cornerstone for high-quality classroom instruction for students with disabilities (CEC, 2012b; Cook & Smith, 2012). Survey responses from state and district special education administrators affirm this sentiment (Holdheide et al., 2010). In fact, nearly all respondents (92%) to Holdheide et al.'s (2010) survey advocated for the use of evidence-based strategies to be included as a component of the evaluation process for special educators.

In addition to the unique responsibilities and expertise required of special educators, many take on a variety of roles at the school campus. Some teachers work with small groups, others serve as case managers, and many teachers provide instruction in a co-teach model; in other contexts, they are assigned as content mastery teachers,

resource teachers, or self-contained teachers (CEC, 2012b). Moreover, many special education teachers perform more than one role in the same day and often share responsibilities in providing instruction and coordinating support services for students with disabilities, making it difficult to ascertain the impact of the various professionals who are responsible for the academic outcomes of a student with disabilities (Holdheide et al., 2010; Quigney, 2010; Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Components of an Effective Teacher Evaluation System

Three components are most often described in developing teacher evaluation systems: (a) observation protocols, (b) measures of student progress, and (c) teacher credentials. Each of these will be considered in the context of general education and special education.

Protocols

The use of observation protocols is, by far, the most common process used in teacher evaluations (Little, 2009). Observation protocols typically require that a principal or a school administrator observe the teacher as he or she delivers instruction. The observation, feedback, and evaluation rating are based on an established rubric that describes effective teacher competencies. In their survey of state and local special education directors, Holdheide et al. (2010) reported that 94% of local districts included teacher observations as part of the evaluation process. They pointed to the critical importance of classroom observations, even in teacher evaluation systems that have been recently implemented:

Observations continue to be the foundation of teacher evaluations, even in newer systems that incorporate other measures of success. They are the only part of an evaluation system that nearly every teacher in every grade and subject experiences, and they are often afforded the greatest weight in determining a teacher's final evaluation rating. (TNTP, 2013, p. 1)

Benefits and challenges of observation protocols. Observation protocols provide a description of the inherently interactive and complex teaching process and the classroom learning experience. The protocols also present insight into the nuances of interactions between teachers and their students (Goe, 2007). The results of both large- and small-scale research projects have shown that it is possible to link classroom observation data to student outcomes when observations are carried out under appropriate conditions (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Kimball et al., 2004; Milanowski, 2011; Odden et al., 2004; Pianta & Hamre, 2009; Sindelar et al., 1990; Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

The most comprehensive of these studies was conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2012) through the collection and analysis of 7,491 videos of lessons submitted by 1,333 teacher participants, a subset of the total 3,000 participants. Lessons were reviewed at least three times using a variety of observation protocols, studying both instructional strategies and content. Five important findings emerged:

1. Regardless of the observation protocol employed, all of the observation instruments demonstrated a positive relationship to measures of student progress,

which was determined using assessments that resemble state tests, as well as open-ended response assessments.

2. Reliable teacher evaluation scores require multiple observations. Teacher scores varied widely depending on the lesson and the observer. Researchers noted that at least four observations were required to obtain a reliable score.
3. Teacher evaluation scores improved in predictive power and reliability when observation scores were combined with student achievement gains and student survey feedback.
4. The combination of measures more accurately identified teachers with positive impact on student learning than did traditional measures of teacher quality, such as experience and degrees held.
5. Teachers who achieved strong scores on the combination of measures also scored well on other measures of student outcomes, such as content-based understanding and factors related to motivation. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012)

Several additional researchers have established a relationship between teacher evaluation ratings and student achievement. For example, Jacob and Lefgren (2008) reported convincing evidence that principals were able to recognize good teaching and that they could accurately identify teachers whose students demonstrated the largest and smallest achievement gains. However, principals were less accurate in making distinctions among teachers whose student gains were in the middle of the distribution. Even so, the research team found that their results were compelling enough to

recommend that policymakers utilize principal observations in personnel decisions and teacher evaluations.

Pianta and Hamre (2009) analyzed the results of standard observations carried out in approximately 2,500 classrooms and subsequently concluded that teaching behaviors can be accurately assessed and analyzed to identify sources of error, can be valid predictors of positive student outcomes, and can be improved when teachers are provided support and exposure to best practices. Results were consistent across investigators, teachers, and student samples, which varied by grade, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

Kimball et al. (2004) analyzed the relationship between teacher evaluation ratings and student achievement results from district, state, and national norm-referenced assessments in math and reading for more than 2,000 students in grades three through five. Results suggested that a relationship existed between variations in student achievement and teacher evaluation ratings. Milanowski (2011), in a follow-up study, summarized several investigations that focused on the relationship between teacher evaluation ratings and student growth scores. While acknowledging that differences in the implementation of teacher evaluation systems exist, Milanowski reported positive correlations between teacher evaluation scores and student outcomes. Further, the correlations were present across school districts over time and with different teacher evaluation systems.

Even though these studies are encouraging, it should be noted that not all research regarding the link between teacher observations and student outcomes has demonstrated a

positive correlation. Goe (2007) analyzed the results of 20 studies that were designed to investigate the relationship between observable teaching practices and student progress. In general, the results demonstrated positive correlations between teacher observation ratings and student achievement, but the author reported that the results were not statistically significant and criticized a number of studies for having faulty research design or implementation. Goe concluded, “There is an overall lack of findings that are both strong (i.e., significant) and convincing (i.e., appropriate design, methods, and instrumentation)” (p. 31).

There are several important reasons to approach the use of observation protocols with caution. Most notable among the challenges in using observation protocols is the difficulty in attaining consistent ratings among evaluators. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2012) noted that:

Even with systematic training and certification of observers, the MET project needed to combine scores from multiple raters and multiple lessons to achieve high levels of reliability. A teacher’s score varied considerably from lesson to lesson, as well as from observer to observer. (p. 8)

Goe (2007) noted the disadvantages of carrying out classroom observation, citing that the practice is “difficult, time consuming, expensive, and subject to the complications of context” (p. 11). Some of the challenges include:

1. Principals are more successful in identifying those who are very effective and those who are very ineffective than they are in distinguishing between teachers who possess mid-range skills (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008);

2. As a result of social and political pressures, principals are influenced to inflate teacher ratings (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008);
3. The standards on which observation protocols are based tend to vary from one to another, and these standards are not always specific enough to result in consistent teacher performance ratings (Kimball et al., 2004);
4. Teacher observation protocols produce reliable ratings only to the extent that evaluators receive adequate training and the schools themselves have invested in norming exercises among evaluators (Mathis, 2012);
5. Some indicators found in the observation protocol may have a more direct impact on student achievement than do others. In addition, it is possible that some indicators require only a minimal level of implementation for effective instruction, while others must be carried out with a high level of expertise (i.e., classroom management versus differentiation; Milanowski, 2011);
6. A high level of variability in classroom quality exists during a typical school day (Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

Difficulties in implementing observation protocols with special education teachers. There are several challenges in using typical observation protocols to evaluate special education teachers. First, the accuracy of teacher evaluations is greatly dependent on the evaluators' instructional expertise—expertise that may vary widely with regard to special education. It is not unusual for special education teachers to have greater knowledge in serving students with disabilities than do their school administrators. At

times, this disparity may result in a lack of credibility in the principals' ability to evaluate teacher performance (Frudden & Manatt, 1986).

In a survey of state and local special education directors, participant responses indicated that only 12% of administrators had received training on how to implement the evaluation system when assessing special education teachers. The majority (77%) believed that assessors should have training specific to evaluating special education teachers; yet, in reality, practices seldom reflect this expectation (Holdheide et al., 2010). These concerns reflect long-standing difficulties that have been documented for more than 30 years, including those related to the frequency of principal observations, the absence of meaningful feedback, and principals' lack of knowledge regarding special education programs and unique student needs (Frudden & Manatt, 1986; Katims & Henderson, 1990; Moya & Gay, 1982).

An additional challenge in using observation protocols to evaluate special education teachers arises when general education and special education teachers share responsibilities in the same classroom. More than ever, the number of students served in the general setting continues to climb such that several teachers share responsibilities for the students' academic progress. This style of teaching, referred to generally as the co-teach model, has become increasingly prevalent in the classroom, and the task of evaluating teachers in this model poses several dilemmas for the evaluator. For instance, it is difficult to determine (a) whether the special education teacher is providing direct instruction and support, or simply monitoring student participation or behavior; (b) whether the special education teacher is responsible only for students with disabilities or

for the general education students, as well; and (c) the impact of the general education teacher's instructional expertise, as well as the teacher's experience and skill in implementing the co-teach model (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013).

Practitioners also reported ambivalence with regard to the question of how to implement standard observation protocols in evaluating special education teachers. The results of a survey conducted by Holdheide et al. (2012) of state and local special education directors showed that 85% of the respondents used the same observation protocol for all teachers, but more than half (56%) reported that they modified the protocol to reflect the unique role and specialized skill of the special educator. Only 12% of the respondents had access to observation protocols that were designed specifically for special education teachers, and, in most cases, these protocols were available only to teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities (Holdheide et al., 2010).

These results suggest that many appraisers believe that the standard observation protocols that they are using to evaluate special education teachers do not provide a true representation of the teachers' roles and responsibilities, or are not specifically tailored to the unique instructional setting of special education teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010). When evaluators modify the protocols, however, it is possible that standards are applied in an unsystematic and subjective manner, thus negatively affecting the accuracy of teacher evaluations (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Most recently, Johnson and Semmelroth (2014b) proposed a conceptual framework for the design of teacher evaluation tools for special education teachers. They suggested that the evaluation instrument incorporate research-based instructional

practices for students with disabilities. They also emphasized the importance of a system that is relatively easy to implement and that is easily adapted to special education teachers in a variety of settings.

Measures of Student Progress

Metrics that are used to describe student progress or growth over time are generally referred to as *measures of student progress*. The most common of these measures are *value-added measures*, which include a number of statistical models that use a student's prior test data to predict expected academic growth (Braun, 2005; Carey, 2004). The comparison of the student's actual growth to predicted growth is attributed to the teacher in the form of a value-added score. Although most research has focused on the use of value-added models, some states have adopted a simpler metric that relies on a comparison of two student test scores, referred to as *student growth percentiles* (IES, 2012). Portions of this section have been previously published (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Benefits and challenges of incorporating measures of student progress. The most important benefit of incorporating measures of student progress in teacher evaluation systems is that they provide a means to evaluate teacher effectiveness based on improved student outcomes, a metric that is aligned to the core purpose of our education endeavors. In addition, value-added measures have the advantage of measuring growth rather than achievement, a distinction that potentially allows for equitable comparisons to be made among teachers, regardless of the student populations they serve. The results of a value-added analysis are often used to identify appropriate professional development for a particular teacher or to guide personnel decisions, such as

hiring or teacher assignment. In theory, value-added models can serve as an advantage to teachers of at-risk populations, as they could provide measures of student progress that would be difficult to obtain using only achievement data (Braun, 2005; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Nevertheless, growth models have been slow to gain credibility among practitioners for a number of reasons. These include (a) their reliance on standardized test scores, (b) the variability in teacher scores from year to year, (c) the difficulty in understanding the mathematical model, (d) the challenges of applying large-scale measurement to individual teachers and students, (e) the difficulty of separating teacher effects from those of the campus, (f) the variability in value-added scores that results from different student achievement tests and the timeframe in which students are tested, and (g) the use of value-added measures for high-stakes decisions (Braun, 2005; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Corcoran, 2010; Glazerman et al., 2010; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Papay, 2010).

Since the introduction of value-added measures in the early 2000s, educators have debated the advantages and challenges of incorporating value-added measures into teacher assessments, a topic that has proven to be quite complex. Many have felt that the benefits of implementing value-added measures would essentially outweigh the challenges. Glazerman et al. (2010) advocated that significant differences in teacher performance *do* exist and that these differences affect students. The researchers concluded that value-added measures, while perhaps imperfect, are still an important means for improving performance and should be considered as we establish improved

teacher evaluation systems. The authors conceded that value-added models are not always reliable, yet they suggested, “The use of imprecise measures to make high stakes decisions that place societal or institutional interests above those of individuals is wide spread and accepted in fields outside of teaching” (p. 7) and cautioned against setting “unrealistic expectations for the reliability or stability of value-added” (p. 8).

More recently, educators have sounded a strong word of caution with regard to the use of value-added scores as a component of teacher evaluation ratings. A compilation of briefs prepared by prominent researchers, including Darling-Hammond, Kane, Rockoff, Braun, Friedman, and others, sought to provide clarity with regard to the benefits of value-added measures and the potential for their misuse (IES, 2012). On the one hand, the contributing authors noted that value-added measures are better indicators of teacher effectiveness than are other available measures and that value-added scores are predictive of student achievement. On the other hand, they collectively expressed their concern that the shortcomings of value-added models may result in unintended negative consequences. They noted design and technical issues that have resulted in inconsistent scores, the potential for bias related to student assignments, the practical difficulties of translating teacher value-added scores into a teacher evaluation rating, the inadequacy of a value-added measure in capturing the full range of expectations related to a teacher’s responsibilities, and the challenges of data quality control. Damian Betebenner of the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment summarized the dilemma:

The biggest challenge in this development is to strike the perfect balance between issues associated with technical adequacy (e.g., reliability/precision, accuracy/bias, validity) and the creation of a system that has the potential to increase the efficacy of the education system. (IES, 2012, p. 2)

In practice, several states are now reconsidering their decision to incorporate value-added measures in their teacher evaluation systems. In April 2014, the Tennessee Board of Education voted to rescind its policy that links teacher licensure renewal to student test scores (Cheshier, 2014).

Difficulties in incorporating measures of student progress in evaluating special education teachers. Initially, measures of student progress were viewed as an important means to recognize teachers for student progress, not just for student achievement at a particular point in time, but also for their growth. This distinction was especially relevant for students with disabilities who may have been receiving on-level instruction but were still performing below grade level. What is not readily apparent, however, is that students with disabilities are not a homogeneous student group, making the application of statistical models that measure longitudinal growth difficult to carry out and to validate (Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Sledge & Pazey, 2013). There are a number of challenges related to implementing measures of student progress in the evaluation of special education teachers, which are described in the following subsections.

Challenges in obtaining datasets. A difficult challenge in calculating value-added measures for students with disabilities is the lack of consistent and complete datasets (Blanton et al., 2006; Brownell et al., 2012; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide et al.,

2010). Value-added scores depend on linking standardized test scores to student performance from one year to the next. According to district and state special education directors, only 41% of special education students participated in standardized testing (Holdheide et al., 2010). Given that special education students are frequently exempted from standardized testing, move from school to school, or take different versions of the test from year to year, their test data is often incomplete.

Thus, making a linkage between standardized test scores of special education students and their performance represents a unique challenge for educators. Value-added systems are dependent on complete and consistent data, and not all systems account for inconsistencies in the same way. As a result of these difficulties, according to Holdheide et al. (2010), “The science of value-added modeling has not included and specifically addressed special educators and English language learner specialists; a research-derived model for these teachers does not exist” (p. 12).

Another interesting challenge in calculating value-added measures involves the sample size needed to create reliable value-added models. For instance, in many situations, there are not adequate numbers of students with disabilities to be able to make the same kinds of statistical predictions that are made for general education students. The relatively small database of special education students, especially those with low-incidence disabilities, makes the analysis more difficult and less trustworthy. As student results are disaggregated by grade level and type of assessment, the relatively small number of student test scores in the database makes the analysis inherently more difficult. Moreover, unique student assessment systems of each individual state preclude the

possibility that states might combine data sets. Additionally, statisticians have noted that calculations are further complicated because student descriptors sometimes change over a given period (i.e., disability classifications sometimes change, as does the student's classification as a general education or special education student), and teachers are not consistently identified as special education or general education teachers in state-wide databases (Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010).

Challenges in calculating value-added scores. Value-added scores are based on a projected growth model of student achievement. The mathematical formulas that form the basis for value-added projections, or predicted growth scores, rely on careful analysis of student population trends. Special education students typically score lower on standardized assessments than does the general student population. Statisticians warn that the value-added scores are more difficult to predict for students who score very high or very low on the distribution of results, leaving unanswered questions about the validity in comparing value-added scores from various points in the distribution. Some researchers have raised the question of whether a 10-point gain near the middle of the distribution is equal to a 10-point gain at the higher or lower end of the bell curve (Ahearn, 2009; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010).

Challenges in establishing consistent testing conditions. Another challenge to consider is the testing conditions for students with disabilities. Conditions may vary, depending on the accommodations that students are allowed. Accommodations may vary by student and subject, by type and number, and from one year to another. Variations in accommodations occur due to changes in the students' IEP, changes in state policy, limits

on available resources, inconsistencies in the implementation of accommodations, and changes in the teachers' ability to select and implement appropriate accommodations. It is unclear, however, how the changes in accommodations from year to year affect student results and value-added scores (Ahearn, 2009; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010).

Challenges in assessing students with severe disabilities. Students who exhibit severe cognitive disabilities are usually administered an alternative assessment that is highly individualized to meet the students' unique needs. Results derived from students who are evaluated using an alternative assessment are not currently included in value-added models, as value-added systems do not at present have the capability to combine scores from different types of tests to measure student growth (Ahearn, 2009; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010). Ahearn stated:

The psychometric barriers to adding students who take an alternative achievement standards assessment to calculations that are designed for large group assessment results are significant and attempts to make them fit into the schema now available under growth models hold little promise for yielding meaningful information about the academic development of these students. (p. 10)

Thus, it is evident that alternative assessment results are not compatible with value-added models or other measures typically used to assess student progress on a large scale.

Challenges in assigning teachers to student scores. Many students with disabilities receive instruction in the same subject from more than one teacher. In some

cases, this takes place in the same classroom (co-teach model), and, at other times, a student receives instruction in the same subject from two different teachers, i.e., a general education teacher and a special education teacher, during two different class periods. Measuring each teacher's contribution to the student's academic growth has presented a dilemma (Blanton et al., 2006; Brownell et al., 2012; Burdette, 2011a, 2011b; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010).

The team of specialists who manage Battelle for Kids, a national not-for-profit organization that provides value-added measures for education agencies, uses a system of linking individual teachers and students, asking teachers who share responsibilities to collaboratively decide on a percentage that represents each person's contribution to the student's learning (Holdheide et al., 2010). Teachers are encouraged to calculate the percentage of time the student spends with each teacher and to engage in a dialog that will result in a deeper understanding of their shared responsibilities.

Nevertheless, there are still inherent difficulties in making these judgments and in carrying out the required data linkage. Concerns such as whether the model assumes that both educators are assuming a similar level of responsibility, how to quantify a teacher's contribution, and what factors outside the teachers' control might influence student learning have led some leaders within the field of special education to believe that it is "nearly impossible to validly and reliably determine what these individual teachers' contributions to student growth might be" (Brownell et al., 2012, p. 274).

Challenges in differentiating teacher influence from campus influence.

Separating the effects of school-based decisions, policies, and culture from the individual

contribution of the teacher is a troubling aspect of the value-added model. Consider these scenarios: At School A, most students with disabilities are assigned to general education classes and receive instruction in an inclusive setting. At School B, the majority of students with disabilities spend most of their day in self-contained special education classes with few opportunities to learn with their general education peers. According to the most current findings, educational research would likely predict that the students who spend more time in mainstreamed classes are likely to outperform their special education peers who are assigned to self-contained classrooms. Thus, the students at School A would be more likely to demonstrate greater student achievement than would those at School B. However, through the utilization of the value-added model, the teachers at the two schools would be held to the same measure of accountability when, in reality, they are affected by decisions and policies outside their control (Feng & Sass, 2010).

Certification and Credentials

Historically, teacher certification and teacher preparation have been central to human capital systems in the education setting. Recently, however, policymakers have begun to question the long-held belief that traditional teacher preparation programs and professional credentials, such as teacher certification and degrees in the field of education, are valid markers of teacher quality. After reviewing the student outcomes for more than 10,000 general education teachers in grades three through eight who were hired through the New York City DOE between 1999 and 2005, Kane and Rockoff (2007) reported no difference in math achievement among students who were assigned to

teachers who were traditionally certified, those who were certified through an alternative program, and those who were not certified.

Kane and Rockoff (2007) also studied the relevance of years of experience as they compared student outcomes for teachers in traditional and alternative certification programs during their first, second, and third year of teaching. While students of teachers from traditional teacher preparation programs fared slightly better during the teachers' first year, by the third year, student achievement from traditionally prepared teachers was similar to that of teachers who were certified through alternative programs.

Possible benefits of incorporating teacher credentials in evaluating special education teachers. Several researchers have investigated whether these findings were similar for both general education teachers and special education teachers and whether certification and teacher preparation make a difference for teachers who serve students with disabilities. In 2004, Sindelar et al. carried out a comparative study of three teacher preparation programs, including university preparation and two different alternative certification programs for special education teachers. When research assessors used classroom observation protocols to evaluate teacher effectiveness, graduates of the traditional preparation programs received higher assessment ratings than did their counterparts from alternative certification programs. Principal ratings, however, favored teachers who had followed the non-traditional certification route.

Sindelar et al. (2004) concluded that teacher effectiveness is influenced by a number of experiences and that the type of preparation program is just one factor among many. The authors pointed to the critical role of pedagogical knowledge and its

importance for teachers who serve students with disabilities and suggested that traditional certification programs may better prepare special education teachers for these challenges. However, the degree of preparation in pedagogy and content varies greatly within each program type, and the program type alone is not a clear indicator that the teacher will be well prepared.

Nougaret et al. (2005) also compared special education teachers who obtained certification through a traditional preparation program to those who followed an alternative certification pathway. The researchers concluded that graduates of the traditional preparation programs outperformed their counterparts from alternative certification programs on observations, including those related to planning and preparation, classroom environment, and instruction.

The critical connection between credentials for special education teachers and student outcomes also was confirmed in research conducted with 1,475 special education teachers from across the country. Carlson et al. (2004) analyzed five attributes of high-quality teachers, based on student achievement scores. The attribute of teacher credentials included three variables: teacher certification, number of certifications, and highest degree earned. The variable that was most closely associated with positive student outcomes was teacher certification, providing strong evidence that students benefit when their special education teachers are fully certified for the positions they hold.

Feng and Sass (2010) took a comprehensive approach to investigating the relationship between teacher preparation for special education teachers and academic

gains, making use of value-added models to study student achievement data over a five-year period. Their findings indicated that teachers who completed post-baccalaureate studies were more effective in increasing achievement for students with disabilities. Additionally, student achievement gains were positively related to the following teacher experiences: (a) pre-service training, (b) special education course hours, (c) a degree in special education, and (d) certification in special education. The correlation between advanced degrees and student outcomes was particularly strong for reading achievement.

Expanding Our Thinking: Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems for Special Education Teachers

Closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities is of critical importance, and ensuring that teachers who serve students with disabilities are highly effective is a key component of reform models intended to improve academic outcomes for these at-risk students. A careful review of the unique responsibilities and challenges of special education teachers compels us to carefully consider the practices regarding their evaluation. Similar to policies for general education teachers, evaluations for special education teachers must incorporate multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. These standards must be valid measures of teacher performance that account for differentiated roles and responsibilities, provide teachers with meaningful feedback, support teachers in continued professional growth, and balance the need for rigor with practicality. In addition, they must identify teachers whose students demonstrate academic gains, and they must do so in a way that is fair and credible (CEC, 2012b; Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Research and Recommendations in Designing New Teacher Evaluation Systems for Special Education Teachers

Very few examples exist of research studies that have approached the question of how to best evaluate special education teachers. Blanton et al. (2006), however, assessed various methods for evaluating beginning special education teachers, taking into account three measures of effectiveness, which included classroom observation protocols; evaluations of teacher competencies, knowledge, and skills; and teacher self-reports of their background and experiences. In addition, these measures were analyzed in terms of utility, credibility, comprehensiveness, generality, soundness, and practicality.

Blanton et al. (2006) recommended that teacher evaluation systems make use of multiple measures of effectiveness, acknowledging that the usefulness of a model lies in the specific purpose and context in which it will be implemented. They communicated the need to link measures of student progress to teacher quality and to educate policymakers with regard to the complexities of the special education context. Finally, they warned against the temptation to impose standard solutions on distinct problems.

After analyzing survey results from practitioners across the country, Holdheide et al. (2010) offered examples of promising practices. They suggested the following for designing an effective teacher evaluation system for special education teachers: (a) begin with a common framework to define effective teaching and include differentiated criteria, where appropriate, for special education teachers; (b) include evidence-based practices; (c) make use of standardized assessment data and other evidence of student outcomes; and (d) align the evaluation framework to professional development opportunities.

In 2009, the CEC brought together an advisory group to explore the topic of teacher evaluation. In subsequent years, they met with their board of directors and then drafted a position paper on the subject. At the 2012 CEC convention, comments were collected from members, as well as researchers and policy experts, resulting in the following published recommendations: (a) use a common evaluation system for all educators that is differentiated to address the individual role and performance standards of various teachers; (b) utilize teacher evaluation systems that are grounded in research-based strategies; (c) make use of evaluations that are linked to professional development; and (d) apply processes with transparency and fidelity (CEC, 2012b).

Undoubtedly, these broad-based recommendations must be thoughtfully applied to the task of implementing effective teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers. Following the framework developed by Goe (2007), the researcher noted that the proposed changes fall into three categories: (a) processes, including classroom observation protocols and systems for providing meaningful feedback; (b) outcomes, such as student achievement measures; and (c) inputs that consider the validity of traditional markers of teacher quality, such as credentials and teacher preparation.

Processes: Improving observation protocols. Several recommendations have been offered for improving the use of observation protocols in evaluating special education teachers. One possibility is to replace or modify the observation protocol with a rubric that is designed with clear expectations and performance criteria specific to the special education setting (CEC, 2012b; Holdheide et al., 2010). A second recommendation is to provide professional development for assessors that would guide

them in developing the expertise they need to accurately assess teacher effectiveness and to provide meaningful feedback to teachers of students with disabilities (CEC, 2012b; Holdheide et al., 2010). Finally, a third recommendation is that teacher-to-teacher observations be incorporated into the evaluation process. For example, some districts are already experimenting with models that make use of peer evaluations, in which master teachers serve as a second appraiser in observing the teacher and, afterward, collaborate with the school leader in the summative evaluation and the design of related professional development (Holdheide et al., 2010).

It has also been suggested that a special education administrator might partner with the principal in completing teacher evaluations (Fruden & Manatt, 1986). These recommendations possess the potential to improve the accuracy and consistency of teacher evaluations, provided evaluators are given appropriate training and support in using observation protocols. In addition, the implementation of these recommendations would not be overly complicated and would most likely be perceived by teachers as credible. Moreover, these approaches could build the capacity of evaluators' expertise in best practices related to special education and increase meaningful professional collaboration.

Outcomes: Incorporating measures of student achievement. Student outcomes matter a great deal, yet the feasibility of applying growth models to many special education populations remains uncertain at best. Systems that are based on growth data, rather than achievement data, are essential, but these systems must take into account the unique and individualized nature of the instruction provided to students with

disabilities. The value-added model does not appear to be well suited for this purpose, and it seems unlikely that a single data source could effectively measure student progress, especially when one takes into consideration the aforementioned broad range of performance levels among students with disabilities (CEC, 2012b).

Several different types of data sets have been offered as possible solutions to the special education data dilemma. Holdheide et al. (2010) reported that some school districts use student learning objectives as a basis for measuring student growth through the use of a criterion-referenced assessment or a curriculum-based evaluation. The survey respondents noted support for this approach, 60% of whom agreed that achievement gains would be an acceptable component of teacher evaluation. In addition, of these survey respondents, 73% reported that they would be in support of using student progress toward IEP goals as a measure of student outcomes. Another approach to measuring teacher effectiveness makes use of professional development goals, an approach already being incorporated into many state (56%) and district (62%) evaluation systems (Holdheide et al., 2010).

Even though these recommendations provide a means to account for the unique context of special education and could be implemented with relative ease, they also present several difficulties. For example, teachers' skills in writing and implementing effective IEPs vary greatly, and, therefore, the use of IEP goals as a means to evaluate teachers could be subjective and lack sufficient rigor. Likewise, unless they are sufficiently challenging and are linked to substantial student outcomes, evaluations based on professional goals will be ineffective. These shortcomings show that the data used to

determine teacher effectiveness must be credible and must hold up to public scrutiny, and it is not clear whether student IEPs and teacher performance goals would meet these expectations of rigor. Moreover, at present, there is no research base to verify that the successful completion of these performance goals is linked to significant gains in student achievement (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Therefore, we are left to wrestle with the question of identifying data sets that effectively demonstrate evidence of academic growth for students with disabilities. Research teams consistently call for investigations to study ways to link measures of teacher quality to student achievement (Blanton et al., 2006; CEC, 2012b; Holdheide et al., 2010), yet the research community has not provided a viable alternative for special education teachers. While Holdheide et al. studied survey results to describe current practices, there are very few researchers who have closely examined the details of incorporating student data as a component of teacher evaluation for special education teachers. There is a void in research that would provide a more descriptive analysis of practices, e.g., (a) how we might identify other types of data sets that are currently being used to evaluate student progress; (b) areas where this process is being carried out successfully; (c) what we can we learn from successful practitioners that might shed light on the question of how to incorporate these data practices into the process of identifying effective teachers and improving teacher quality.

Inputs: Teacher certification and credentials. At a time when general education programs are questioning the value of traditional markers of teacher qualifications, these indicators for special educators may be worthy of consideration in

the teacher evaluation process. Much of the research carried out in the last decade in the field of special education appears to indicate that traditional teacher preparation, including pre-service training in the teacher's assigned area of specialty, advanced degrees, special education certification, and special education course hours, is linked to teacher effectiveness (Carlson et al., 2004; Feng & Sass, 2010; Nougaret et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004).

Teachers who serve students with disabilities rely on a specialized body of knowledge and expertise that may be imparted more effectively through traditional preparation programs and advanced degrees in which extended periods of time are devoted to learning the necessary subject matter. The recommendation to include traditional markers of teacher quality is made with caution, understanding that great variations exist among traditional preparation programs and that simply designating a program as traditional or non-traditional may not sufficiently differentiate quality pre-service programs (Sindelar et al., 2004).

Involving practitioners. The voices of teachers and other special education practitioners are critical in helping decision makers better understand the context within which students with disabilities are served. Answers to the dilemmas we face are most likely to be provided by researchers who seek to gain insight into the experiences and opinions of those who currently work in the field of special education. Researchers have insisted that reform measures be developed through dialogue and input from teachers and administrators. Brownell et al. (2012) asked “how the complexity of special education teaching will be captured accurately and validly and how will the voices of those

knowledgeable about special education be included in conversations about how to best evaluate these teachers” (p. 275). Likewise, Goe (2007), who reiterated the need for meaningful involvement of stakeholders, stated, “Reform doesn’t work if the people involved do not believe in it or worry it will be implemented unjustly” (p. vii).

Summary

Improving human capital systems is a key component of current school reform. These systems must align performance competencies and performance assessment to the goals of the organization. As such, new, innovative models of teacher evaluation have been designed to meet changing expectations that teacher evaluations incorporate measures of student progress. Many believe that the introduction of value-added measures and their inclusion as a component of teacher evaluation would meet this expectation. While value-added measures of student progress have led many to redefine what it means to be an effective teacher, i.e., one whose influence is evident in student achievement gains as measured by standardized test scores, not all educators have embraced their use as fair and valid indicators of teacher quality.

Researchers have attempted to identify links between teacher effectiveness and student achievement by considering inputs, processes, and outputs. Applying these same components in consideration of the unique differences in roles, expertise, and circumstances in which special education teachers carry out their work is a challenging endeavor. If we define an effective teacher as one who delivers instruction that results in improved student learning, then we also must identify the inputs and processes that are linked to positive student outcomes for students with disabilities. We are called on to

move quickly into the forefront, to advance our concerns, and to provide the appropriate and effective means to create teacher assessment processes that result in meaningful and accurate teacher evaluations for all teachers. This goal can most effectively be accomplished through the detailed study of the teacher appraisal practices found in schools and school districts that are demonstrating success.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter begins with the purpose of the study, followed by the research questions and research method and design, including an explanation for the decision to employ a qualitative methodology, using a multi-case study. The chapter also provides a description of the site selection, followed by a description of the data sources, methods of data collection, data analysis, and assurances for validating the research findings. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Purpose of the Study

While national and state initiatives directed toward the development of more meaningful and accurate teacher evaluation systems have become a major reform initiative, very little attention has been devoted to the challenges of employing evaluation systems that reflect the unique roles of special education teachers. The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators on two middle school campuses that have demonstrated success in increasing student achievement for students with disabilities. Both of these school sites are located in a large school district that has adopted a new teacher evaluation system that is aligned current research on teacher evaluation reform. The researcher examined participants' views of how the teacher evaluation system identifies effective special education teachers, the ways in which administrators and teachers approach the challenges of applying the teacher evaluation system to the roles and

responsibilities of special education teachers, and current practices that support the professional growth and development of special education teachers.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?
2. How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?
3. How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

Research Method and Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach and a case study research design to investigate the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in the use of teacher evaluation systems. A qualitative research design was selected because it allowed the participants to describe their everyday experiences as they occur naturally in the workplace and to reveal their realities and beliefs. A qualitative approach lends itself to the topic of teacher evaluation due to its emphasis on process, which is central to the implementation of teacher evaluation systems, and its capacity to capture complexity (Mertens, 2010).

A case study allows the researcher to focus on specific content and to collect data in a naturally occurring environment, making use of multiple sources of data. The bounded system is a defining characteristic of a case study (Yin, 2009). In this investigation, the bounded system consisted of the special education teachers and

administrators on two middle school campuses that have demonstrated success for students with disabilities.

Rationale for a Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research methods provide an in-depth account of practices in a particular program or setting and are designed to describe naturally occurring events. Through qualitative research, the investigator is able to focus on the unique context in which individuals live and work and can provide a holistic picture of the experiences and beliefs of the participants, revealing a deeper understanding of hidden or underlying issues (Mertens, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Roberts, 2010). The researcher used a qualitative methodology to gain insight into the experiences of special education teachers and administrators as they use the tools that are intended to measure and increase teacher effectiveness. A qualitative approach elicits detailed, in-depth descriptions of the experiences and perceptions of participants to uncover practices, explore beliefs, and make meaning in the unique and complex school setting (Mertens, 2010).

A qualitative approach has several benefits. First, the rich descriptions taken directly from those closest to a specific setting or situation make it possible to capture the intricacies of a given situation and to better understand issues not otherwise readily apparent. In addition, the researcher is able to gain knowledge of topics about which much is already known, e.g., teacher evaluation systems, as well as topics for which very little is known, e.g., the extent to which teacher evaluation systems are modified or adapted for special education teachers. These details result in a clearer understanding of current practices and perceptions than would not otherwise be possible using only

quantitative measures (Roberts, 2010). Finally, a qualitative research approach provides a means for the voices and perceptions of practitioners to be made known in a field of research that is currently dominated by quantitative research studies (Goe, 2007).

Case Study Design

Case study is a strategy utilized in qualitative research that allows the researcher to investigate a “how” or “why” question in a contemporary setting (Yin, 2009). Case studies result in data that are rich in description, including both qualitative and quantitative data sources. Investigators use case studies to uncover fresh insights and to extend or confirm previously held knowledge. A case study is practical, extremely concrete, vivid, and deeply grounded in context.

According to Merriam (1998), a case study has these unique characteristics:

1. A case study design is *bounded*; i.e., it is unique to a particular situation for which it is nearly impossible to separate the variables from the context of the situation.
2. It is *particularistic* in that it focuses on a particular situation or phenomenon. A case study will concentrate attention on the way a particular group of individuals confronts a given problems or challenge, while taking a holistic view of the situation. While the case study can give perspective into a specific situation, it can illuminate a general problem or shared challenge.
3. A case study is *descriptive*. It illustrates the complexities of a given situation, considering the multiple factors that influence the outcome. It also illustrates the influence of personalities on the issue and can illustrate the influence of the issue

over time. Vivid quotes often spell out differences of opinions and varying perspectives on a given viewpoint.

4. Case studies are *heuristic*, meaning that they provide insight into the phenomenon under consideration. The study may bring about the discovery of new information, or new meaning can be given to previously understood information. It may extend the experience of the audience or confirm what is already known. Connections and relationships among variables can emerge that were perhaps previously unknown and may lead to a re-thinking or a new consideration of how events unfold and why they do so in a particular way. A case study can explain the reasons for a phenomenon or provide background into a situation, to understand what is happening and why. It can explain why a particular innovation worked or failed and provide an analysis of various approaches and perspectives.

For the purpose of this study, a case study design allowed the investigator to gather thick, detailed information in an authentic setting, i.e., the school campus. In addition, the investigator was able to uncover human behavior and day-to-day practices to better understand how these experiences are lived out in the social context (Willis, 2007). The decision to use multiple cases, in this situation, two middle school campuses, was made to strengthen the validity of the findings and to result in more compelling conclusions. As noted by Yin (2009), “Analytical conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case alone” (p. 61).

Case studies are limited in several ways. First, the case study provides a thick, rich understanding of a particular context. The conclusions, however, may not apply to other contexts, and great caution must be exercised. Second, case studies can result in a great deal of research data, making analysis difficult and time consuming. In addition, a case study may risk over-simplifying a problem or an experience if the nuances of the situation are not fully explored. Case studies also rely heavily on interviews, the quality of which is highly dependent on the researchers' skills and biases, which Merriam (1998) described as the "sensitivity and integrity of the researcher" (p. 42). Finally, case studies can be influenced by current events that may impact the participants and/or the researcher. In this case, frequent media stories about changes and controversies related to teacher evaluation systems, at both the state and national levels, may have had an influence.

Site and Participant Selection

Site selection included two steps. First, a school district was identified that had implemented a new teacher evaluation system aligned to research that supported teacher evaluation reform measures. Second, two school sites were identified that met the criteria outlined below.

District and Campus Site Selection

The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in the teacher evaluation process. This multi-case research design included two middle school campuses that are located in a large urban district that has been involved in the implementation of a new

teacher evaluation system that was designed to meet expectations of new reform performance management models. Two large middle schools were selected, as they had a sufficient number of special education teachers and special education service models to provide a range of descriptions of how special education teachers and administrators approach the various challenges related to teacher evaluation in the special education classroom. The administrative structure of the middle school also allowed for a number of appraisers, i.e., principals and assistant principals, thus providing a variety of perspectives and experiences.

Site selection for the two campuses was based on each school's record of academic success, specifically with regard to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Both schools had demonstrated success with state assessment results in reading and math for students with disabilities over a period of three years. The site selection process was predicated on the underlying assumption that positive student outcomes are related to effective teaching practices, including effective school organization and culture. A key component of effective school organization and culture is a meaningful teacher evaluation process. The researcher identified two middle schools that met the following criteria:

1. The campus had enrolled a minimum of 25 special education students for each year in the past three years for which data were available.
2. The passing rates for special education students in math and reading on state assessments were 70% or better for the last three years for which data were available.

3. The participation rates for special education students in math and reading on state assessments were 90% or better for the last three years for which data were available.

Eligible campuses were identified through online public state databases. The final selection for the two school sites was made through a purposeful, convenience sampling based on the campus's having met the stated criteria and the participants' willingness to take part in the study.

Participant Selection

Interviews were conducted with district level administrators, school site administrators, and special education teachers. Participation was based on the individual's role and his or her willingness to meet with the researcher for an interview.

Data Sources

In qualitative research, according to Mertens (2010), "The researcher is the instrument that collects data" (p. 366), meaning that he or she has the central role in gathering information. As is typical for a case study, multiple data sources were used, including interviews, document review, and observations.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews are a key source of information for the qualitative researcher (Mertens, 2007), as the researcher's aim is to gather valuable details and to observe, firsthand, the interaction of the participants in their natural setting. In addition, the interview allows the researcher to more fully understand the participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data source for this study, as the researcher

was guided by pre-determined questions, while maintaining the flexibility to adjust questions or to ask probing questions.

Document Review

Documents and records provide many details of the typical practices of teachers and administrators. In this case study, the collection of documents and quantitative data included both formal and informal data sources, such as copies of policies and observation protocols used in teacher evaluation; teacher schedules that reflected their roles and responsibilities; evidence of their specialized expertise; and data used to assess student academic progress.

Observations

The third type of data source was classroom observations. These observations provided a means for the researcher to monitor, firsthand, the daily practices of special education co-teachers.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection took place during the spring semester of 2014. Twenty-three interviews were conducted in February and March. Documents were collected from the district and school sites, as well as from individual teachers and administrators. In May, the researcher returned for a classroom observation and two additional interviews with special education administrators. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher took notes during school site visits, carefully observing each campus and becoming familiar with the neighborhoods they serve. Initial thoughts and questions were noted.

The researcher reviewed notes and reflected on responses, and then returned to the open-ended questions to make minor adjustments to the word choices.

Participants in face-to-face interviews included (a) seven teachers from School Site #1, (b) six administrators from School Site #1; (c) five teachers from School Site #2; (d) five administrators from School Site #2, and (e) one administrator from the district office. One teacher at each of the two school sites declined to participate.

A written response to interview questions also was obtained from an administrator at the district office. Three of the school site administrators were asked to participate even though they did not currently evaluate special education teachers. They did, however, oversee important aspects of the special education program and worked closely to coach and guide teachers. It is possible that they influence the overall success of the special education program and, specifically, the special education teachers. The researcher made the decision to include them in the administrator interviews to better understand their role and potential influence in the success of special needs students on their respective campuses and to further explore their role in supporting teachers in their professional growth and development.

Data Collection

For this study, the primary source of data was participant interviews, supported by document review and observation. To protect the rights and welfare of participants, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas in Austin. In addition, the researcher communicated with the selected school district and completed all requirements needed to conduct external research.

Interviews

After the researcher had been granted consent to proceed, communication with the district special education administrator and school principals began with a meeting to explain the study and to secure support and cooperation. The school leaders provided a list of special education teachers on their campuses, along with their assignments and contact information. Participants were contacted via email to secure commitment and schedule the interview. Then, after participants completed the required informed consent forms, semi-structured interviews began, first at one campus, and then at the second campus. The questions for the interview were peer-reviewed in advance. The researcher then followed a semi-structured format using pre-planned interview questions, which are included in Appendix A.

The researcher began each interview with an explanation of the purpose of the research and the Consent to Participate form, included in Appendix B. Most interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, although a few were as short as 20 minutes, and two were more than 40 minutes long. There were 21 interview participants who agreed to be tape-recorded. These interviews were then transcribed, and a copy of each transcript was emailed to the participants for their review. None provided any editions or corrections. Three participants declined to be tape-recorded, so the researcher took notes during the interview and then shared the notes with each of them via email. None provided any editions or corrections.

Document Review

Documents, including those previously described, were obtained from special education administrators and classroom teachers. A summary of the documents collected can be found in Appendix C.

Observations

The researcher requested and was granted permission to observe two classrooms in which a general education teacher and a special education co-teacher were sharing responsibilities for student instruction. The researcher remained in each classroom for approximately 25 minutes, seated away from the students but situated so that interaction between teachers and students was easily observed. Teacher instruction, the sharing of responsibilities, verbal and non-verbal exchanges, the location of the teachers in relation to the students, and the relative time each teacher spent in leading the lesson were some of the observations the researcher made note of during the classroom lessons.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research methodology, the investigator engages in analyzing the data by first breaking it down into categories and subcategories, then recombining the categories into common themes and features. The categories are assigned codes, or labels, and are then compared to identify similarities, differences, and connections. The data are, in effect, reorganized or recombined, based on the connections between the disparate pieces (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing so, the researcher seeks to understand the specific features of the categories and to identify the relationships among categories. In addition, the findings are validated through the process of triangulation,

identifying common themes or categories that appear in multiple data sources. The emerging relationships guide the researcher to better understand the context, causes, and consequences of the various phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this qualitative, multi-case study, the collection of data through interviews, document review, and classroom observations resulted in many pages of data. These volumes of data were reviewed and analyzed with one goal in mind: listening intently to the voices of practitioners to uncover their beliefs and perceptions about the teacher evaluation system, including whether it (a) identifies effective teachers; (b) presents challenges in evaluating special education teachers; and (c) supports professional growth. The process included reading and rereading interview transcripts, consolidating data, making connections between research data, finding similarities and differences among sites and participants, and toggling between concrete bits of information and larger, more abstract concepts.

The analysis began during the data-gathering process, as the researcher made observation notes and studied the data as they were collected. Next, the researcher read through all of the interview transcripts, considering the many pieces of discrete information that could have been helpful in answering the research questions, noticing similar ideas expressed by various participants and varying points of view. The researcher first focused on the roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers and identified common categories to describe the critical differences between their role and that of the general education teacher. These categories included (a) responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction, (b) planning and leading ARDs, (c)

collaboration with other professionals, (d) parent communication, (e) student assessment and progress monitoring, and (f) meeting the social and emotional needs of students. It was essential to provide a thorough description of the daily lives of the teachers to fully understand their perceptions and beliefs with regard to the teacher evaluation system.

The researcher then directed her attention to the three research questions. Focusing on one research question at a time, she reviewed the interview protocol, identified the pre-planned and probing questions that were used in the interviews to solicit responses, and reread the transcripts to identify common themes. Then, based on these impressions, she constructed a matrix for each question. Along the left were codes for each of the teacher and administrators who participated, and along the top were key questions or themes related to each research question. For example, Research Question 3 asks whether the teacher evaluation process supports professional growth. The key “look-fors” in the matrix were: (a) Did the participant discuss the Individual Professional Development Plan? (b) Did the participant discuss the value of feedback? (c) What rating did the participant give to the system in terms of supporting professional growth? Did the participant elaborate? What themes did he/she mention? (d) What concrete examples did the participant provide? and (e) Did the participant provide other examples of experiences that have helped him or her grow? The next step was to return to the transcripts, rereading each one with these specific themes or topics in mind, and making notes in the matrix. The completed matrix was then used to understand a “big picture” summary of the participants’ experiences, while also serving to identify common themes, similar and divergent points of view, and possible cause-and-effect connections.

Validation of Findings

Findings were validated through several measures. The researcher completed a bracketing exercise prior to data collection to better understand the preconceived notions or biases that she brought. Participants were provided copies of their interview transcripts or interview notes. Multiple data sources provided a means to corroborate evidence or provide additional insight (Creswell, 2007).

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a description of the research design methodology. An explanation regarding the selection of a qualitative multi-case study was provided, including the limitations of such an approach. The chapter also provided a description of the site selection and participant sampling, followed by a description of the procedures for data collection and data analysis, as well as strategies to validate findings.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins with an overview of the design and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system in a large urban school district. It presents the purpose and process for its design and provides a description of the new teacher evaluation system to provide a thorough context for the study. Following the portrayal of the school district and the role of leadership in implementing the new system is an explanation of how the two school sites were selected for this research project. An account of these schools, including their history, communities, and achievement records, is followed by a description of the research participants and their responses to the research questions.

While the purpose of a qualitative case study is to provide rich detail in describing the context of the study, the researcher took precautions to protect the anonymity of the district, school sites, and individual participants by assigning pseudonyms. Where possible, the researcher also removed or avoided references to the district, school sites, or participants that did not significantly affect the findings.

The findings are presented in the following order:

1. Roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.
2. Research Question 1: How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?
3. Research Question 2: How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?

4. Research Question 3: How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

Teacher Effectiveness Defined through New Teacher Evaluation Systems

Ignited in 2009, by the release of *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al), educators, researchers, and private, non-profit educational organizations engaged in an intense discussion related to teacher effectiveness. Weisberg et al. highlighted the lack of alignment between traditional human resource practices and a school district's goal of improved student achievement. In addition, it documented the ways in which traditional teacher evaluation systems have failed to differentiate among educators, such that the majority of teachers receive positive evaluations with little regard for their varying contributions to student success. Not only have school leaders ignored poor performers, but they also have failed to recognize effective teachers.

In response to this national call for more effective and meaningful performance evaluation systems, a large urban school district launched a multi-year partnership with a national, non-profit educational organization. Together, they would design and implement improved human resource practices through a shared commitment to ensuring that all students have excellent teachers. System redesign would focus on strategic recruitment and staffing, useful appraisals, individualized teacher support, and teacher career pathways with differentiated compensation.

During the 2010–2011 school year, working groups of teachers, administrators, parents, and district staff met to develop a new teacher evaluation system, including the rubrics, processes, and other necessary tools. Members of the district-level special

education leadership team were involved in the development process. Each school-based decision-making committee was asked to provide multiple rounds of feedback; input also was solicited through community members during open public comment periods. In May 2011, the Board of Education approved the new teacher appraisal and development system for implementation in the 2011–2012 school year. For the purposes of this study, the district will be referred to as Southwest Consolidated.

Components of the Teacher Evaluation Appraisal and Development System

The new teacher evaluation system included key elements aligned to recommendations for improved teacher performance models as noted in the emerging literature, as follows:

1. Teachers receive regular feedback and individualized support for their professional growth, regardless of where they are in their career.
2. All teachers are appraised every year.
3. The appraisal cycle includes a self-reflection and goal-setting conference, supported by observation and feedback from the teacher's appraiser. Teachers and appraisers meet three times during the course of the year to focus on goals, progress, and accomplishments for the purpose of supporting improved teacher performance.
4. Appraisal scores are based on multiple measures of performance, including:
 - a. Instructional Practice: Appraisers assess teachers in classroom observations and provide feedback on 13 instructional standards, as outlined in the Instructional Practice Rubric, using four levels of proficiency. A minimum of

two 30-minute observations and two 10-minute observations are required for each teacher.

- b. Professional Expectations: Nine professional expectations include objective, measurable standards related to professional behavior and responsibilities. They are outlined in the Professional Expectations Rubric behavior, using four levels of proficiency.
 - c. Student Performance: The student performance component utilizes several different approaches to measure the impact of a teacher on student achievement. Some of the approaches include the use of value-added growth, comparative growth on district-wide assessments, student progress scores on locally developed assessments or performances, and student attainment scores on locally developed assessments.
- 5. Where possible, all teachers receive a rating on each of the three performance criteria, which are combined to determine summative scores, with four levels of proficiency, ranging from ineffective to highly effective.
 - 6. Appraiser training and certification is a carefully controlled and monitored process.
 - 7. Teacher performance evaluations have a significant bearing on employee-related decisions, including tenure and termination.

Figure 3 below presents the criteria included in the Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations Rubrics.

Instructional Practice Criteria	
Planning 1	PL-1: Develops student learning goals
Planning 2	PL-2: Collects, tracks, and uses student data to drive instruction
Planning 3	PL-3: Designs effective lesson plans, units, and assessments
Instruction 1	I-1: Facilitates organized, student-centered objective-driven lessons
Instruction 2	I-2: Checks for student understanding and responds to student misunderstanding
Instruction 3	I-3: Differentiates instruction for student needs by employing a variety of instructional strategies
Instruction 4	I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills
Instruction 5	I-5: Maximizes instructional time
Instruction 6	I-6: Communicates content and concepts to students
Instruction 7	I-7: Promotes high academic expectations for students
Instruction 8	I-8: Students actively participate in lesson activities
Instruction 9	I-9: Sets and implements discipline management procedures
Instruction 10	I-10: Builds a positive and respectful classroom environment
Professional Expectations Criteria	
Professionalism 1	PR-1: Complies with policies and procedures at school
Professionalism 2	PR-2: Treats colleagues with respect throughout all aspects of work
Professionalism 3	PR-3: Complies with teacher attendance policies
Professionalism 4	PR-4: Dresses professionally according to school policy
Professionalism 5	PR-5: Collaborates with colleagues
Professionalism 6	PR-6: Implements school rules
Professionalism 7	PR-7: Communicates with parents throughout the year
Professionalism 8	PR-8: Seeks feedback to improve performance
Professionalism 9	PR-9: Participates in professional development and applies learning

Figure 3. Criteria for instructional practice and professional expectations.

Adjustments and Changes in the Implementation of the New Teacher Evaluation System

As the district moved forward with each year's implementation, stakeholder feedback was solicited, focus groups were held with teachers and appraisers, surveys were tabulated, and school-based decision-making teams provided input. Additional supports for teachers and appraisers were provided through the professional development services, and a closely managed system for collecting data was established. Adjustments

and changes were incorporated as needed, especially with regard to the student achievement component.

To ensure a fair and reliable process, district leaders supported teachers and appraisers through (a) required, prescriptive training for appraisers and teachers; (b) extensive printed materials and documents; (c) online technology tools for submitting teacher data; (d) online technology supports to describe quality teaching and learning; (e) expectations and strategies for appraiser norming; (f) close oversight, including annual staff review, by principal supervisors; and (g) strict accountability and electronic compliance monitoring systems for entering and tracking teacher appraisal data.

During the 2012–2013 school year, the district leadership established a team of individuals whose sole responsibility was to support the performance management. The team consisted of a Senior Manager of Human Capital Accountability, who oversaw the performance management systems for teachers, administrators, and non-instructional employees with a focus on the appraisal system, human resource data, and its relationship to professional growth. The team included 11 managers who supported between 20 and 30 schools, answering specific questions related to employee evaluation. Typically, managers responded to inquiries that pertained to calculations and student performance, how ratings were derived, and the intricacies of the student performance component. There were also queries regarding systems and processes. The team supported administrators with norming and calibration with the intent to ensure that appraisers were fair and objective; that they used low inference in the making judgments; and that the

feedback was based on evidence. Then, the team supported administrators in follow-up feedback and effective coaching skills to support the growth of all teachers.

Recent changes were described to the researcher by the Senior Manager of Human Capital Accountability, who provided these details about the ways that the district has worked toward improved support for school administrators, as follows:

In the past, it [the appraisal training] was two-day training. Currently, it is a five-day training, and it's all day. So it's 40 hours of training that an individual who is in a position to appraise teachers; they must complete this training in order to do the role. And within this new training, five-day training, we cover, certainly, these documents, but so much more. So I think that we're doing a better job of preparing appraisers currently than we were in the past. . . . Certainly, if they are new to the appraiser role, they, by policy, have to be certified. They cannot appraise an employee, a teacher in this particular case, unless they have completed the training. . . . So [if] they appraised one year, they didn't appraise the next year, then we encourage them to come back and get retrained. It's not a requirement currently; we're looking at retraining all appraisers. But currently, it's not a requirement, and that's how we handle it.

Development of Special Education Supplement

During the 2012–2013 school year, the district leadership team responded to feedback regarding the challenges of evaluating special education teachers. Although members of the district special education leadership team had participated in the original design of the appraisal system, teachers and administrators expressed a need for

additional direction. The human capital team then worked with the special education department to develop a supplement that could provide additional guidance to appraisers when they evaluated special education teachers. The *Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs* was added to the documents and policies of the teacher's appraisal system for the 2013–2014 school year.

The senior manager described its development:

So we certainly think that the Instructional Practice Rubric covers all circumstances, all levels of teachers and students alike. However, there was a need for, in some of the criteria for some of them, not all of them, but some, to provide some additional guidance in terms of what appraisers can look for, and these “look fors” are detailed in that supplemental guidance document. Thus, the development actually took place over a period of two years. This [the document] was developed last year [2012–2013], and we came to it again this year [2013–2014]. It wasn't released last year, it was developed last year. We came to it again this year, went back to it, reviewed it, ran it by the special ed department again, and made some minor revisions and changes, and we did release it this year officially. So it is available for appraisers to use.

The assistant superintendent for special education provided further insight into the document's purpose, stating that the guidelines would most readily apply to the special education teachers whose students typically follow an alternate curriculum. She explained, “For those teachers that teach an alternate curriculum aligned to alternate achievement standards, our office has provided a supplementary tool.”

The purpose of the supplement is to provide guidance to campus administrators on appraising special education teachers; it is not intended to be a separate rubric for special education teachers or to be a comprehensive guide for good instructional practice in the special education classroom. The document clarifies that the district’s Instructional Practice Rubric includes indicators that apply to teachers in all grades and subjects. The supplemental document also presents context for administrators to consider when applying the rubrics.

Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs

The supplement includes notes for appraisers in four areas of the 13 criteria included in the Instructional Practice Rubric. The guidelines offered to appraisers are presented in Figure 4.

Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs: Summary of Key Points
<p><i>Planning PL-1: Develops student learning goals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisers may pay specific attention to students’ IEPs and how accommodations may affect annual learning goals. • When reviewing student learning goals, appraiser may consider severe limitations for some students with disabilities, i.e., students with multiple impairments.
<p><i>Instruction I-1: Facilitates organized, student-centered, objective-driven lessons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students who have significant communication challenges or who have severe disabilities that affect their cognitive ability may have limited ability to articulate what they are learning. • Appraisers may see a range of ways that students in the special education classroom demonstrate understanding, including non-verbal methods, completion of a project of life skill routine, and pointing to, sorting, or manipulating written text, tactile objects, or pictures.
<p><i>Instruction I-2: Checks for student understanding and responds to student misunderstanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers may use a variety of approaches to check for understanding based on the needs of the students, for example, having the student explain a concept or process; use visual cues, tactile symbols, signs, gestures, key words or sentences to encourage a

<p>student to recall content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For lower-functioning students, teachers may engage in one-on-one sessions to observe subtle changes in student behavior, demeanor, or physical reactions to determine the student's level of understanding.
<p><i>Instruction I-3: Differentiates instruction for student needs by employing a variety of instructional strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When differentiating instruction, appraisers may choose to observe the extent to which teachers are familiar with the needs and abilities of their students, including use of appropriate accommodations and modifications.

Figure 4. Summary of key points of Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide.

The researcher sought to learn more about the method for disseminating the Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs. First, how was this information shared with appraisers? The senior manager explained that all appraisers participate:

Through our annual update, teacher appraisal update that occurs in August, and also through various modalities. The Academics Service memo [online district communications system] our web page for sure, and thus, I think we have the vehicle for communicating this to the field.

When asked, “Is there an avenue or has there been an avenue for this to be communicated directly to teachers?” the senior manager replied, “No. We work with appraisers only. We do not work with teachers.” The human capital team, does, however, share documents with the teacher professional development support team.

The researcher also pursued this topic while meeting with school-based personnel, including both administrators and special education teachers. Several administrators were experienced and had been evaluating teachers since the inception of the new teacher evaluation system. Others were in their first year and had, in fact,

completed the 40-hour training described by the senior manager. Nevertheless, upon the completion of 23 school-based interviews with principals, assistant principals, special education chairs, and special education teachers, the researcher did not encounter any individuals who referred to or were in any way aware of the Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs.

Case Study Site Selection

The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in the teacher evaluation process. This multi-case research design included two middle school campuses that were located in a large urban district and that had been involved in the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system designed to meet expectations of new reform performance management models. Two large middle schools were selected, as they had a sufficient number of special education teachers and special education service models to provide a range of descriptions of how special education teachers and administrators approach the various challenges related to teacher evaluation in the special education classroom. The administrative structure of the middle school also allows for a number of appraisers (principals and assistant principals), thus providing a variety of perspectives and experiences.

Site selection for the two campuses was based on each school's record of academic success, specifically with regard to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Both schools have demonstrated success with state assessment results in reading and math for students with disabilities over a period of three years. The site

selection process was predicated on the underlying assumption that positive student outcomes are related to effective teaching practices, including effective school organization and culture. A key component of effective school organization and culture is a meaningful teacher evaluation process.

Collecting data from two school sites offered several important advantages. By looking carefully at two schools with similar results, the researcher had the opportunity to make comparisons in supervision and teacher evaluation practices despite differences in student demographics, communities, and campus histories. Collecting data from two school sites also offered the potential for a more compelling view of similarities and differences and the opportunity to identify more robust conclusions. The four participant groups provided varying perspectives. These groups included (a) teachers at the two school sites, (b) administrators at the two school sites, and (c and d) teachers and administrators at the same site who experienced the teacher evaluation process from different perspectives, providing the potential for analysis across groups and for greater insight.

The researcher identified two middle schools that met the following criteria:

1. The campus had enrolled a minimum of 25 special education students for each year in the past three years for which data were available.
2. The passing rates for special education students in math and reading on state assessments were 70% or better for the last three years for which data were available.

3. The participation rates for special education students in math and reading on state assessments were 90% or better for the last three years for which data were available.

Eligible campuses were identified through online public state databases. The final selection for the two school sites was made through purposeful, convenience sampling based on the campus's having met the stated criteria and the participants' willingness to take part in the study. The pseudonyms for the two middle school sites are Frank Luke and Maple Leaf. State assessment results, as well as the number of students tested and the percentage of participation, are provided below in Table 1. State assessments results are shown for 2010, 2011, and 2013. Results are not available for 2012, as the state was making a transition to a new assessment and did not release scores.

Table 1

State Assessment Results for Special Education Students

District and School Sites	Number of Students Assessed in Reading	% Meeting State Reading Assessment Standards	Number of Students Assessed in Math	% Meeting State Math Assessment Standards	Participation of Students in State Assessment
State Assessment Results 2013					
SCD	10,711	56%	10,388	53%	98%
FLM	99	71%	99	70%	92%
MLM	86	83%	86	80%	100%
State Assessment Results 2011					
SCD	*	74%	*	67%	94%
FLM	101	80%	101	79%	94%
MLM	87	92%	87	82%	91%
State Assessment Results 2010					
SCD	*	72%	*	62%	*
FLM	121	82%	81	82%	*
MLM	81	87%	81	80%	*

*Data are not available on state databases.

Note: SCD = Southwest Consolidated District; FLM = Frank Luke Middle; MLM = Maple Leaf Middle.

Table 2 presents the demographics of the district and of the students at both middle schools. It includes the percentage of each race as well as those who are economically disadvantaged and English language learners.

Table 2

Demographics of District and School Sites 2013

District and School Sites	Student Enrollment	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Two or More Races	Econ Disadv*	ELL**
Southwest Consolidated District	202,586	25%	63%	8%	3%	N/A	80%	30%
Frank Luke Middle	1,418	6%	93%	0%	0%	0%	96%	29%
Maple Leaf Middle	1,195	11%	34%	41%	11%	3%	32%	6%

*Econ Disadv = Economically Disadvantaged

**ELL = English Language Learners

Frank Luke Middle School

The vision statement for Frank Luke Middle School is, “Achieving success as a team—110% . . . NO EXCUSES!” This large campus serves just under 1,500 students in grades 6 through 8.

Campus History and Programs

Frank Luke Middle School opened in 1927 with an educational emphasis on agriculture. It was rebuilt in 1949 and is one of the original district Vanguard (gifted and talented) programs established in 1975 to encourage integration across the school district. Frank Luke Middle School is home to 1,418 students who are enrolled in one of the following academic programs:

1. Magnet Vanguard: Vanguard students experience a pre-advanced placement (AP) curriculum in all content areas and the opportunity to obtain high school credit in algebra, integrated physics and chemistry, Spanish, technology, and art. Students are accepted through an application process.

2. Dual Language Program: Students maintain or further develop formal academic Spanish language skills while focusing on state standards for Spanish and English, as well as cultural understanding.
3. E.X.C.E.L.: Students in the E.X.C.E.L. Academy are scheduled in math class daily and provided elective classes to support math and reading skills.
4. Newcomer Program: Recent arrivals to the United States who have not yet mastered English language skills receive intensive English instruction.

Students take two electives, choosing from technology, performance arts, and visual arts. Choices in the arts include art, music, band, mariachi, and choir. Technology is being made available on the campus through both PC and Apple labs, laptop carts, iPod carts, 200 Kindles, 500 iPads, Smart boards in every classroom, and document cameras. Vanguard students have the opportunity to participate in National Junior Honor Society, Science Fair, Kick Start Karate, inter-varsity league competitions, Model United Nations, folkloric dances, art club, skateboarding, cheerleading, and robotics. Competitive sports include soccer, football, volleyball, and basketball.

Surrounding Community

Frank Luke Middle School is located just 13 minutes from the downtown business center in a community constructed primarily in the 1930s and 1940s, whose only major recent development was the construction of a toll road that makes downtown destinations more easily accessible to suburbanites who travel into the city.

Narrow asphalt streets are lined with deep ditches and aging culverts, designed to swiftly dispose of late afternoon thundershowers. Mom-and-pop businesses show off

their tires and rims, while their proprietors rest comfortably in driveway lawn chairs. Industrial support services line the streets, including do-it-yourself carwashes and no-tell motels that frequent the main thoroughfares. Abandoned storefronts and warehouses stand alongside rows of empty industrial waste barrels. An auto salvage yard draws a crowd. Used car lots are in proliferation, each surrounded by seven-foot fences wrapped in barbed wire. Just down the street is a thriving tortilleria, a tortilla factory, and wholesale outlet. Small retail shops line the strip centers, including donut shops, taquerias, cell phone stores, payday loan centers, pawn shops, auto parts stores, a washateria, and a used furniture store. Local entrepreneurs set up permanent yard sales on busy intersections. A few street corners have large graffiti-marked murals, but they are few.

Across the street from the school is a small, tucked-in neighborhood, typical of this community. The streets are lined with bungalow style houses, where pickup trucks and cars are parked in the front yard. Almost all homes in the immediate vicinity were built just before World War II (1940) or just after (1947) on lots that are about 5,000 square feet. Homes vary in size from about 720 to 1,000 square feet. Typical property values are approximately \$48,000. Aging apartment complexes are located on the main thoroughfares, constructed in cinder blocks, with little indication that they have been updated. A large trailer park is also located just down the street from the school.

Inside Frank Luke Middle School

The school's signage and driveway are clearly marked. The parking lot, fence line, and surrounding grounds are litter free, and a sense of order is evident, even from

the entry. The two-story, tan-and-brown-brick building is lined with large windows on both the first and second floors, stretching the length of the building. The lot is large and still supports the original landscape from its construction in the 1940s, including junipers, cedars, pines, live oaks, and crepe myrtles. The traditional middle school features wide hallways, spacious entryways, 20-foot ceilings, and transom windows lodged high above entries and doorways. Frank Luke opened with the time-honored middle school amenities of a large auditorium and a swimming pool. If anything, it is a little disconcerting for first-time visitors to find their way to the front door of this rambling campus.

Once inside the building itself, visitors are welcomed by pale green cinder block walls and a well-polished terrazzo floor. Posted along the hallway that leads from the parking lot to the main office are banners with motivational slogans, including, “Achieving success as a team—110% . . . NO EXCUSES!” Photos and trophies tell the story of a long history of success at this school. Afternoon announcements over the PA system remind students to stay focused and to carry their hall passes. “And congratulations to the boys’ soccer team for the 6-0 win!”

The front office looks out onto a bank of windows, where sunshine streams in. A long counter runs the length of the spacious entry area, with a well-stocked coffee station in the corner. Low-slung, oversized leather chairs face the front counter. Parents cradle sleeping babies, and grandmothers who come to collect their grandchildren wait patiently while the ever-efficient receptionist sends requests over the walkie-talkie to administrators throughout the various floors and wings of the building. Despite the flow

of parents and teachers, the office hums along with quiet purpose. Smiles all around. Quiet demeanor. Respectful interchanges. Doorplates announce more than the staff member's name, identifying their degrees earned and the names of the institutions where they earned their degrees.

In contrast to the earlier grandeur of the school design, the campus is also crammed with portable buildings, moved onto the campus to house the ever-growing population. It would be difficult to imagine that these "temporary classrooms" arrived any time recently. They are painted immaculately in gold and green and carry motivating reminders: "Believe!" "Opportunity!" "Determination!" "Expect success!" One long row of temporary buildings line the parking lot, housing some of the special education classes and offices. Another compound of the same gold, portable classrooms is devoted to one grade level. Despite the cheery exterior, however, the interiors of the classrooms tell their age as portable classrooms hum with loud air-conditioning units, floorboards sag, and the faded walls reveal many years of use.

Special Education Programs

There are eight special education teachers at Frank Luke Middle School who are assigned as resource, inclusion, and self-contained teachers. Seven of the eight teachers participated in the research. The two self-contained classrooms serve students with severe to moderate disabilities and students who struggle with difficult behaviors. All of the teachers manage a caseload of students, ranging in size from five to eighteen students. The teachers have between one and nineteen years of experience in their positions as special education teachers at this school. All of the teachers are certified in special

education; four also have a generalists' certification. Only one is certified in a core content area and only two are certified to instruct English language learners. Four of the teachers came to the profession through the traditional university course of study and three gained their certification through an alternative certification program. Each teacher is assigned to an appraiser, either the principal or one of three assistant principals. Please refer to Table 3 for a list of teacher participants.

Table 3

Special Education Programs at Frank Luke Middle School

Teacher	Assignment(s)	Caseload/ No. of Students	Years in Position	Years with District	Areas of Certification*	Teacher Preparation
Ms. Clines	Inclusion	18	4	4.0	Sp Ed EC-12	Alternative
Ms. Montgomery	Resource Math Inclusion	12 or 13	1	1.5	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen EC-6, 4-8	Certification Traditional
Ms. Mock	Self-Contained Life Skills	10	11	14.0	Sp Ed EC-12 ESL	Alternative Certification
Ms. Dilly	Resource Lang Inclusion	15	9	Some prior experience	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen EC-8	Traditional
Mr. Hernandez	Inclusion Resource	17	12	20.0	Sp Ed EC-12 Math Spanish Bilingual	Traditional
Ms. Isaiah	Inclusion Resource	16	19	19.0	Sp Ed EC-1 Gen 6-8 Counseling Administration	Traditional
Ms. Winston	Self-Contained Behavior Support	5	1	1.5	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen 4-8 Physical Ed	Alternative Certification

Note: Sp Ed = Special Education; Gen = Generalist.

Maple Leaf Middle School

The vision statement for Maple Leaf Middle School is, “Believe! Achieve! Succeed!” This campus serves approximately 1,200 students in grades 6 through 8.

Campus History and Programs

Maple Leaf Middle School was constructed to relieve the overcrowding in three neighborhood middle schools and is located in a part of the city that experienced unprecedented growth between 1980 and 2000. Small, quiet neighborhoods mushroomed into six-lane streets, complete with retail and business services. The freeway was rebuilt,

and lanes were added to the feeder roads, for a total of 18 traffic lanes. Old homes were torn down, and new ones replaced them overnight. Upscale brick apartment complexes were constructed, as were townhomes and condominiums. Home values rose. The city couldn't build fast enough.

The school opened in 2002. Families who were zoned to one of the three identified middle schools were provided the chance to participate in a lottery for enrollment to attend Maple Leaf. In addition to its being a “boundary option” school, Maple Leaf also was designated as a magnet school for foreign languages, including Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Students throughout the district may gain entrance to the school by applying to the foreign language magnet program. In 2014, more than 2,400 students applied for 500 spaces in the Maple Leaf foreign language magnet program.

During the sixth grade year, all students experience a rotation of languages. Then, students are asked to narrow their focus to one or two languages in seventh and eighth grades, with the opportunity to gain high school credit in selected languages.

All students are encouraged to apply for the Vanguard (gifted and talented program) to participate in pre-AP courses. They are assigned to one of three “houses” and remain in that house for their three years at middle school. Students may obtain high school credit in algebra, geometry, and integrated physics and chemistry.

Maple Leaf Middle School has been recognized for the following honors: National Blue Ribbon School, State Business Coalition Honor Roll School (four years), “No Place for Hate” designation by the Anti-Defamation League (five years), Student

Council Sweepstakes winners, Odyssey of the Mind (teams have advanced to state and world finals), and Honors at the National Spanish Exam (three years). Six national dissertation championship teams have been awarded more than \$300,000.

Competitive interscholastic sports are offered in the cheer squad, volleyball, basketball, football, cross-country, soccer, boys' and girls' lacrosse, track, baseball, softball, and swim team. Fine arts offerings include band, choir, dance (break-dance, hip-hop, street dance), theater, photography, and art.

Surrounding Community

Also located just 13 minutes from downtown, the neighboring community is nestled between several thriving areas of the city to where young families flock, knowing they will be zoned to successful public schools. Streets are wide, well paved, and striped with carefully marked crosswalks. Two- and three-story professional buildings are found on the major thoroughfares of this community, side by side with banks, retail outlets, restaurants, and an exclusive private school, whose well-appointed athletic complex and stadium are just down the street from Maple Leaf. Attractive gardens and miniature waterfalls grace the apartment entryways, as brick and wrought iron fences line the streets. Lawns and entryways are well manicured. Carefully landscaped sidewalks and esplanades are lined with crepe myrtles and live oaks. On one side of the street, the sidewalks have been updated by the city and widened to eight feet to accommodate neighborhood pedestrians and cyclists.

Across the street from the school is a large community college campus. National retail businesses are located just down the street, including a large pet supply store, an

expansive home garden center, and a home improvement store. A nearby strip center is home to a restaurant, a sandwich shop, a nail salon, a store that services laptops, and an academic enrichment center that provides tutoring for students. Just around the corner is a dog park, 50 yards wide and 300 yards long, built on land reclaimed from a railroad right-of-way.

Inside Maple Leaf Middle School

The Maple Leaf Middle School campus is a 174,500-square-foot building located on 18 acres of land, a site that was previously home to local horse stables. The driveway into the school overlooks the soccer field and is designed for spacious carpool lanes and visitor parking. Behind the school is a second, additional parking lot with rows of neatly marked parking spaces for faculty and special events, and designated areas for the magnet students to board buses.

The vaulted, two-story modern glass rounded entry welcomes students and visitors. The dark brown brick is accented with school accolades in white lettering: National Blue Ribbon School, State Recognized, and Exemplary Campus. The front entryway opens into a carpeted office, decorated in tones of brown and navy and equine motifs that are reminders of the previous use of this location. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, yet businesslike. Original student artwork, a large collage with colorful designs greets visitors at the entry desk. Cases along the front hallway display student projects and academic work. Flags that represent the many countries of students who attend Maple Leaf line the hallways. There are currently 23, but the number grows each year as new students arrive and discover that their flag is not yet represented.

Across the hall from the main office is the library, a wide, sweeping area with an extra-high ceiling, carpet, and coordinated upholstery in tones of blue and brown. Rows of attractively arranged bookcases and four-person library tables stretch across the library, creating both open spaces and study nooks. Classrooms and technology space adjoin the library for easy access and combined project work. On the many visits made by the researcher, the library was friendly and inviting, yet never contained more than a handful of students.

Special Education Programs

There are six special education teachers at Maple Leaf Middle School who are assigned as resource, inclusion, study lab, and self-contained teachers. Five of the six teachers participated in the research. The two self-contained classrooms serve students with severe to moderate disabilities and students who have been diagnosed with autism. All of the teachers manage a caseload of students, ranging in size from nine to 20 students. The teachers have between one and eight years of experience in their position as a special education teacher at this school. All of the teachers are certified in special education and as generalists. Only one is certified in core content; two are certified to instruct English language learners. Four of the teachers came to the profession through an alternative certification program, and just one completed the traditional university course of study. Each teacher is assigned to an appraiser, either the principal or one of the three assistant principals. Please refer to Table 4 for a list of teacher participants.

Table 4

Special Education Programs at Maple Leaf Middle School

Teachers	Assignment(s)	Caseload/ No. of Students	Years in Position	Years with District	Areas of Certification*	Teacher Preparation
Mr. Smith	Inclusion Study Lab	20	2	2	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen 4-8	Alternative Certification
Ms. Jones	Self-Contained Life Skills	9	2	13	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen EC-4 Reading 4-8 ELA 4-8 Soc Studies 4-8	Alternative Certification
Ms. McRay	Inclusion	17	6	6	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen K-6	Alternative Certification
Ms. Hill	Resource Reading Study Lab	12	8	37	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen K-8 ESL	Traditional
Ms. Marshall	Resource Reading Resource Math Inclusion	10	1	1	Sp Ed EC-12 Gen 4-8 ESL	Alternative Certification

Note: Sp Ed = Special Education; Gen = Generalist.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Frank Luke and Maple Leaf Middle School share many common characteristics. They are both part of a large urban school district that has implemented a new teacher evaluation system, the campus enrollments are similar in size, and both schools accept a portion of the student body through an application process. On these two campuses, the special education teachers are assigned as resource, self-contained, and co-teachers. Many of the teachers take on more than one of these roles, and, in addition to their teaching duties, all of the teachers carry a caseload of students for whom they are responsible.

The principals on the two campuses are strong instructional leaders. They observe in classrooms often, both formally and informally, and they speak with knowledge and confidence when describing their special education programs. Principals and assistant principals on both campuses are assigned as the appraisers for special education teachers. Each campus also has a special education department chairperson who oversees the special education program and provides support for special education teachers, but does not evaluate teachers.

Student demographics for Frank Luke Middle School differ considerably from those of Maple Leaf in terms of ethnicity, income, and English language proficiency. Of the students at Frank Luke, 96% qualify for free or reduced lunch, 29% of the students are identified as English language learners, and the student population is composed of 93% Hispanic and 6% African American students. Maple Leaf Middle School has considerably fewer students (32%) who receive free or reduced lunch, and only 6% of the students are identified as English language learners. The ethnic makeup of the school includes 34% Hispanic, 41% White, 11% African American, and 11% Asian. Despite differences in student demographics, the special education students at Frank Luke and Maple Leaf Middle School have demonstrated success in the state assessment for math and reading during the past three years for which data are available.

The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of the special education teachers and administrators regarding their experiences in implementing the appraisal process. Even while teacher evaluation reform has been directed toward the development of more meaningful and accurate teacher

evaluation systems, very little attention has been devoted to the challenges of designing and employing evaluation systems that reflect the unique roles of special education teachers. Participants were asked to describe their day-to-day practices, their views of the relationship between teacher evaluation and teacher effectiveness for special education teachers, how they approach the challenges of applying teacher evaluation systems in appraising special education teachers, and how the appraisal process supports the professional growth of special education teachers.

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?
2. How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?
3. How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

Roles and Responsibilities of Special Education Teachers

In all performance management systems, it is critical that the evaluation process and the support for professional growth are closely aligned to the roles and responsibilities of the individuals. The systems must carefully identify the tasks of the individuals who are evaluated and take into consideration the relative importance of the various responsibilities. If we are to create human capital systems that ensure a quality teaching force, we must begin by accurately identifying the performance competencies that are aligned to the most important goal of the organization, i.e., academic achievement. A critical question for special education teachers and administrators,

therefore, is the degree to which the daily responsibilities of the special education teacher are aligned to the teacher evaluation.

While many of the responsibilities for general education teachers and special education teachers are very similar, research indicates that special education teachers typically assume the following responsibilities that most regular education teachers are not expected to assume, including (a) collaboration with general education teachers to a greater degree than the general teaching population, (b) communication and cooperation with other special education service providers, (c) communication with parents beyond what is expected in general education, (d) developing and providing oversight in the implementation of a student's individualized education program (IEP), (e) being knowledgeable of special education laws and policies, and (f) supervising paraprofessionals (Brownell et al., 2012).

Therefore, before looking into the research questions in this study, it was essential that the teachers provide a comprehensive description of their day-to-day work. To fully understand the scope and detail of the teachers' responsibilities, the researcher asked each teacher participant to begin by describing their responsibilities as a special education teacher. Though the participants have been given pseudonyms, their descriptions and quotes are factual. First are the responses from teachers at Frank Luke Middle School, followed by those from Maple Leaf Middle School.

Frank Luke Middle School

Ms. Montgomery, resource math and inclusion teacher. Ms. Montgomery was the first teacher to respond to the researcher's request for a meeting. She greeted the

researcher in the front office with a friendly, open demeanor, ready and willing to share her experiences. The interview took place in her classroom, located in one of the temporary buildings located among the seventh grade classrooms. She apologized for having to share a classroom as she moved stacks of papers and charts off the chair and kidney-shaped table to make a place to speak comfortably.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Montgomery described her teaching schedule, referring to green and gold days, as the school is on a block schedule. She is assigned as a resource math teacher during some class periods and serves as a co-teacher during other periods.

I am a case manager for about 12 or 13 kids, and then I also teach resource math, and there is about nine students in each class for my resource math class. . . . So I actually am also teaching an extra help math class, a math test prep class, as well. So when I am not on green days, which are Mondays and Thursdays, I do a lot of co-teaching and then except for that one class I do my math class, but from then on, I co-teach for two [classes], in two different class periods. In one class period, I see two sets of students in two different classes, but then on gold days, which is Tuesdays and Fridays, I see my resource kids seventh period, eighth period, and ninth period . . . and then I also tutor special ed kids in the afternoons. (Ms. Montgomery)

Ms. Montgomery summarized her schedule: “First period, I co-teach two classes. Second period, I teach resource math. Third period, I teach and co-teach. There are also classes in fourth and fifth period. So I teach seven classes.” When she is

assigned as a co-teacher, she has two different classes in the same period and is expected to drop in on both of them. The two classes may be the same subject or grade level, or they may be two different subjects or grade levels.

Collaboration with other professionals. Ms. Montgomery described the approach she typically takes with the general education teacher when she is the co-teacher.

Normally, I will stand next to them [special ed students], and it is a whole lot easier for me personally because I feel very uncomfortable interrupting people [the general education teacher] when they're talking in their teaching . . . that's kind of rude. So when they're working on stuff, I think is when I am better because then we can work through the stuff together, and then, like passing out stuff, and behavior management, keeping an eye on the stuff, so I am actually not the best co-teacher, like, at all. (Ms. Montgomery)

She described planning instruction with her co-teach partners:

I plan a lot with the seventh grade team specifically because this is all seventh grade [gestures to area of campus] and sixth grade, too, but I mostly plan with math in terms of, like, "Oh, he needs extra time to take his test. Can he take it now?" And, "That's fine," or, "You know, they really didn't understand this concept; can you go over it with them?" But, actually, I co-teach in a lot of reading classes, and, I mean, I kind of just show up. They send me their lesson plans and I look over them, and I have an idea of what's going on. But we don't

really sit down and actually plan, like I do with the math team. (Ms. Montgomery)

Planning and leading ARDs. Ms. Montgomery is responsible for planning and leading ARDs for the students in her caseload. She gave the following details in describing the time devoted to ARDs:

To prepare for an ARD takes about an hour and a half because you have to collect teacher input forms, you have to fill everything out, have everything printed up already, and then an ARD usually takes about an hour. I did have an ARD a couple of weeks that was two hours. It was awful. (Ms. Montgomery)

Ms. Clines, inclusion teacher. Ms. Clines had just come in from morning carpool duty with the feeling that the day was already off and running. She was full of smiles and enthusiasm, even if a little out of breath. She sat down with a bottle of water at a small round table in the assistant principal's office. Her face lit up when she talked about her students and her commitment to the work.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Clines is a co-teacher, assigned to two classes for each class period. She described her responsibilities.

I am considered a co-teacher plus a case manager for special ed students. We have approximately maybe 18 students in our caseload. We're responsible for their academic, social needs. We also serve them in the classroom in addition to other students that are also in special education; traditionally, we are following the all-inclusive full inclusion model. (Ms. Clines)

Ms. Clines has five class periods in a day. In four of the five, she is assigned as a co-teacher, and the fifth is her planning period. During the four class periods, she is assigned to eight classrooms. The next day, she is assigned to another eight classrooms during the four periods. She describes her schedule:

A special ed teacher will go in there [the regular ed co-teach class] for 30 minutes. We offer services academically to our students for 30 minutes and then we jump to another teacher. We service from sixth to eighth grade. Some of us only strictly focus on a grade level. I, because I have sixth, seventh, and eighth grade on my caseload, so I serve all three grade levels, and I serve different content areas: English, Reading, Math, Science and Social Studies. So those are all of the areas that we go into. It's a lot of work.

It's a challenge compared to when I first started. We were focused on one class, and we would serve the whole entire class, and that was great. But because of the shortage of staff, we had to go in and cut our time short for 30 minutes. And that's to support facilitation, the model that we serve here. If, in the event that we need other strategies to implement, for example, pullouts, we'll do that as well to try to implement all accommodations that are stated in their IEP, for example, or oral administration during testing; we do that as well.

We've gotten a little smart now that I see your phone. That's what we do now. We record our exams on their iPads, so we are able to serve them that way where they need those oral administrations, or we record it for them, and

they can listen to it. So we don't have to be there the full hour or whatever the case.

We have approximately maybe no more than eight students in a classroom that we serve. So that's a good thing; now that we've cut our time short, we try to limit the amount of students enrolled in a class. So that helps a little with serving them as much as we can.

We have an off period just like a traditional teacher, and it's a challenge because we have to meet with them [co-teach partners] as well in the departments, but we also have to do our paperwork as far as caseloads, prepare for ARDs, you know, send out IEPs, the updates, every progress report. So it's a task, it's a task, but it's a blessing. It gets done. (Ms. Clines)

Collaboration with other professionals. In describing the balance of teaching responsibilities between the co-teacher and the regular education teacher, Ms. Clines explained the relationship she has with her various teacher partners, including their ongoing partnership in terms of delivering the instruction, planning the lesson, and communicating with each other.

We have different models that we practice in the [co-teach) class. We can do the team teaching, meaning, "Okay, you start off and I piggyback on what you're saying," or we have the small groups, and that includes special ed and regular ed. It varies depending on the teacher. Many teachers just like to take control of their class. And, "I just need you to monitor, making sure that they're

on task.” “Sure.” But I can say, wow, most of the time they give the lesson and I break it down for them.

So I don’t want to say that I am in control of the classroom, but I feel that I have a great part of that classroom. So I would say 100% of the time I am in at least in control of that particular situation with my special ed kids. Because sometimes our teachers are wonderful. I have this social studies teacher that she is wonderful. I am like, “Wow, I can’t even help you. How do I help you? You’re doing it all.” And then she is like, “Well, take over it.” And so she’ll let me take over it. It’s wonderful. I love the co-teaching model where you’re pairing yourself with, or team teaching like they call it.

I love that. I love that word, like we piggyback on each other. So it’s, I couldn’t tell you specifically, it all depends on the teacher. If they’re introducing a new concept, okay, I am there taking notes. Also, “Here, let me capture that.” “Well, let me hear what you’re saying.” And a lot of times, I pretend like I am the student. I go in and I am like, “Okay, if she explained it like that, if I am confused, I know they’re going to be confused.” So they know that if I raise my hand and ask questions it’s because I know that’s the same question they [my students] have, but they don’t want to ask. So that’s what I do. So I am involved. My hands are in the flour at all times.

If I have the time, we [co-teacher and regular ed teacher] plan. If we have the time, but keep in mind those are eight different teachers . . . now years ago it was [more realistic to think that we could plan]. It was that way. I would

go in with my math and my science teachers. I am like, okay, and it was the same grade level, so we tried to model the same content in all eighth grade classes. But sometimes, you know, now that we're doing sixth, seventh, and eighth, it is kind of difficult. The good thing about it is they send us their lesson plans, like this morning, they'll send them by 8:30. We get them and the administration gets them, so we'll have a real quick time to review what are they doing. (Ms. Clines)

Meeting social and emotional needs of students. Like many of the special education teachers, Ms. Clines takes a subtle approach to recognizing and meeting the social and emotional needs of the students with disabilities.

I try to make my kids feel as comfortable as possible, not let anyone know that they are part of the special ed. You know, at times they don't like to feel that they're being pointed out. So I help everyone . . . We try not to make them feel isolated from the rest of the group. At least I can't speak for my other co-worker, but I know that's what I do with them. (Ms. Clines)

Planning and leading ARDs. Promotion ARDs for students in grade 8 take place at the high school campus and require additional coordination between the two schools. Ms. Clines described her responsibilities related to ARDs.

[I am responsible for preparing ARDs] for the entire caseload as they are assigned to you. So if I have 18 kids, 18 caseloads. In my case, I have most of my eighth graders, so when we have their annual ARDs I have to prepare, in

addition to promotion ARDs for the ninth grade. If they failed, well, of course, we have other ARDs for that, but they're for the 18 that I serve. (Ms. Clines)

When asked, "How long does it take you to prepare for an ARD?" Ms. Clines responded, Oh my goodness, days. Days only because we have to. I think the teacher's input is definitely important. I need to know what they're doing in class in the event that I don't serve my caseload, For example, I might not serve my caseload in science, but someone else does. So I wouldn't know what they're doing in science. So that's important. So I have to go and get their teacher input: "How are they doing?" "What are they doing?" . . . Definitely getting any records that's going to help us identify whether the student may need a regular state assessment or the modified [version]. Previous records from the schools, looking at the difference to see if they are progressing or regressing. And definitely the paperwork. Just getting the ARD prepared itself. Using Easy IEP [online ARD minutes], well, it takes hours, maybe three hours, four hours to do an ARD on line. Oh my goodness it's a lot of paperwork. (Ms. Clines)

Parent communication. Ms. Clines made it clear that she communicates frequently with parents and makes herself available for parents to contact her. She described the typical time spent answering emails, talking to parents in person, and answering questions about student progress, apart from ARDS and regularly scheduled updates.

Wow, well, I have to tell you again, thank God for technology. Like contacting that particular parent with any concern that I have, because we're moving,

constantly moving. Thank God for text messaging, because I'll throw them a quick message: "I need to meet with you," or, "I need to speak to you at a certain time. Is that okay?" "Yes." . . . So it's daily. It's a daily communication. "I am seeing something I don't like. Mom, I need your support with this. I am just letting you know that I am addressing this issue with your child right away." It's daily. It's daily and, definitely, these are communications that we have with our parents whenever we have to; every six weeks, we have to update our IEPs. (Ms. Clines)

Student assessment and progress monitoring. Teachers are responsible for monitoring the progress and grades for students in their caseload. Ms. Clines explained how she gives attention to the students in her caseload.

So during progress report, I sit down, I look at all of their grades. I sit down with the kid, "Hey," and I may, if I don't get a chance to meet with the kid, I will make a little note: "I need you to improve in this class. What can I do to help you with this class?" And then I contact the parent because we have to send those out to the parents to let them know, "Hey this kid is failing," or, "Look, great job, he is progressing." Definitely at report card time is another time that we communicate with our parents. Every six weeks. (Ms. Clines)

Ms. Clines described how she works directly with students, communicating with each student in her caseload.

I have to, I have to, because I have to stay up on them. And it's harder for those [teachers] who have a resource class, because they have a resource class,

caseload, plus co-teach, so they have extra duties. So we're the ones [co-teachers] that have a little bit more flexibility doing it [meeting with students]. And like I said, most of the kids that we serve, they will be in our caseload. So at one point or another, we're going to see them all together, so during that class period, even if it's five minutes. "Hey, what's going on with this?" We have that opportunity to be able to serve, to speak to them. And even if they're not on our caseload, I get on them, too: "Hey, you need to do this. You know, wake up, or what do we need? Any materials? Okay, here is your binder. You have no excuse to fail." Sometimes it's not the academic piece, but it's their ability to keep track of their course, their classes, remember what their assignments are, being organized. (Ms. Clines)

Ms. Mock, self-contained life skills teacher. Ms. Mock stepped away from her class and described for the researcher the challenges of teaching in the special education classroom. We met in a small classroom while her students continued their lessons next door.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Mock described her responsibilities as a self-contained special education teacher.

I serve the population of students with severe to moderate disabilities, mental disabilities, either intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome; I had a student that was cerebral palsy, but he left, so he had more than one disability, he has a physical disability as well. I do have other students with physical disabilities, but they are not as constricting. So I have students with speech disabilities, so,

typically, we have about 10 students in our class at a time because that changes. We also have students that are kind of high functioning. We have one student that goes out to resource class, so we're trying to get him in a place where he can do resource and regular. As of right now, he is in our class, and he is doing everything that we do, but he also gets instruction in resource.

A typical day for us is we're always here in our classroom. All our content area is here except for that one student. We teach science, social studies, math, English, personal hygiene, safety, vocation. My students go out for PE and music. . . . [Our district has] adopted this new curriculum for life skills and I am excited about it. My students really like it. So what it looks like is, they give us a lesson for a month, and then within that lesson, there are activities. The goals and objectives are there, but there are activities. So we kind of broke it down. For each student, I create a binder for them, and the work that they send in the lesson is leveled. So the ones that are on a higher level are a little more rigorous than those that are lower level, [which] is more simplified for them. So they're able to work together, but they have different lessons. It is more individualized. . . . So that's what we do for a lesson. Within that lesson for that month, I pick and choose what we're going to work on and develop lesson plans that way. (Ms. Mock)

Planning and leading ARDs. Ms. Mock described her role in planning and conducting ARDS for students in her classroom, providing a clear example of the specialized responsibilities and expertise that are required of the teacher.

As far as the ARDs, yes, I have to develop their ARD paperwork. My department chair schedules the ARD, and I develop their IEP and goals for the ARD based on the objectives that are in the state education agency and what we're going to be tested on for the state assessment. So those are the goals and objectives that we use for the year. It used to be more individualized. Those individualized goals come in as personal health, vocation, but the core classes are based on what we're going to be tested over so that the kids are taught and prepared for the state assessment. (Ms. Mock)

When asked how long it takes to prepare for a typical ARD, Ms. Mock responded:

Forever, I am sorry. It takes me at least one day. I would say one workday. I can complete an ARD because of the number of classes that we have and the number of objectives that I have to create for my students. It does take a little bit longer than the typical ARD for a student that is in regular ed. There are [other service providers to coordinate with]. There was a physical therapist, but that student left. That student had the physical therapist and adaptive PE teacher. I have a student now that has a vision impairment, the speech therapist, so those are the main ones that I kind of correlate with at this point, and she has a [teacher] that comes out and she works with her; she is a vision-impaired student, so she works with her in mobility. There are quite a bit of people that we have to work with, and the nurse as well, because we do have students with medical issues that the nurse has to sign off on their ARDs. (Ms. Mock)

Parent communication. The students in the self-contained classroom have more severe disabilities, and, as a result, staying in close contact with their parents often takes on greater importance. When asked how much time she spends on parent communication each week, Ms. Mock explained:

If I had to narrow it down, I would say at least two hours. At least two hours. I think I only have two students that ride the bus. So most of my parents bring their children. So if they come to see me, the door is always open. So they'll just come right in, and we will talk for a few minutes. Most of it is face to face.
(Ms. Mock)

Student assessment and progress monitoring. The responsibilities related to developing student assessment items that meet the requirements of the alternative state assessment for students with severe disabilities require a significant amount of time, as well as teacher expertise. The details provided by Ms. Mock create a clear picture of the size of this task and the difficulty in completing it.

We have to develop the entire assessment. What [the state education agency] gives you is the objectives that they want tested. So just like the regular ed students have, we have to test the same objectives as the regular ed students. What they give us to test is what's called an ESSA statement, and it's broken down into the prerequisite skills, so we might get one little skill that we have to test for. So right now, I am finishing up our math assessment for seventh grade, and I think there is fractions, so they have to look at a whole, look at a part and then make a fraction of that, then they would have to find the fraction.

Well, we've got to develop all of those pieces to that test. Now if it is a graph or a chart, we have to develop that. If it's a story, we have to find something that's on their level, that's not grade level, but on their level, reading level, so that they can identify with the story. So that might include adding some visuals to that story or it might just include, you know, spacing so that they are bolder, bigger print for my vision-impaired student. So it's just a variety of things that we have to include depending on the need of the child.

(Ms. Mock)

The researcher asked whether the teacher could estimate the amount of time it takes to develop and administer the alternative assessment. Ms. Mock responded:

No. I mean, I wouldn't even want to say because I can't even imagine. We do a lot of work at home. My assistant, she is awesome. She creates a lot of the activities, and, I mean, we have been working together for about three or four years now, and she kind of knows what I want it to look like, and she knows how to read it now and develop it. If she has a question, she will ask me, but she takes work home to do, and I take work home to do, because there is not enough time in the day here. So, yes, ma'am, I can't really put a time on that. (Ms.

Mock)

The teacher went on to describe the number of required assessment items and the expertise needed to develop them appropriately.

[I have] 10 students and four different subject areas, and so they have to be tested in all of them just like the state assessment areas, right? It's the same as if

the regular kids, so sixth grade has two tests. They have reading and math. Seventh grade has three; they have reading, math and writing. Eighth grade has four, so and then within those four, it would be so wonderful if you say, “Okay, we’re going to pick this one objective,” but, no, they are tested in four objectives.

Okay? So that’s four tests for each objective per student, and when you calculate how many that is, you just don’t want to hear the end of that number because I think one year I was, like, at 96 tests. And then you would sit and you would think about it because the test is very involved. You have to make supports for each one of your students, and it seems like they are always adding to it what they want you to do. Like, “Okay, you don’t have enough, let’s add a couple of more details. We want you to write about what the student did and describe your approach.” It’s very involved. (Ms. Mock)

The researcher asked the teacher to describe what she meant by “supports.”

Say for instance, I have two students. I have a student that has a vision impairment and I have a student that can read a little bit fluently on a second grade level, so I can give him his story and he can read it, but my student with a vision impairment might have to have an audio story, so that would be her support. (Ms. Mock)

Ms. Dilly, resource reading and inclusion teacher. Ms. Dilly is one of those teachers whom the researcher bumped into no matter what part of the building she was in. She was in the special education department office checking in with colleagues, she was

grabbing coffee in the front office, she was hurrying down the hall on her way to class.

Ms. Dilly's sociable demeanor made conversation easy as the researcher and teacher met in an empty special education classroom.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Dilly described her responsibilities as a co-teacher and a resource teacher.

I have a caseload, and the caseload varies. It varies this year; right now, I have 15 students, and I like working with the students, and I actually have some students that I have worked with in previous years. They're eighth graders now, so that's good.

I teach two language classes, and language is, it's a reading and writing class through a company called Voyager. And it's really good, and it's really intense. . . . Sixth graders during fourth period and seventh graders in second period. And the classes are small, but then you have this group that they're liable [to be trouble], I mean, their behavior, you really have to stay on top of them.

(Ms. Dilly)

Collaboration with other professionals. Ms. Dilly is a co-teacher in eight classrooms during four class periods. She is assigned to help in each class for approximately 30 minutes, although Ms. Dilly confided that co-teachers were usually the first to be called on to be substitute teachers when needed. On days when she is substituting in a classroom, her special education students in the inclusion setting do not see her. The researcher asked the teacher to describe her relationship with the general education teachers with whom she co-teaches.

I try, because you have some teachers that are very open to co-teaching, and you are able to communicate with them. It's kind of like a dance, you know. My analogy is Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire when it's really working well, and then, sometimes, it's just like Dancing with the Stars . . . like when they were dancing with that guy and he was kind of yanking and dragging her across the floor. So it just really depends on how the teachers perceive you. You have teachers that they perceive you as an ally.

Some teachers, they're like, "Oh, they're here and they're judging me." Because one teacher that I have become more of a partnership with, he said, "Oh, did I spell this correctly? Did I do that?" And I am like, "I am not here to judge you. I am here to help you. I am here to help the kids. I am not here to evaluate you." So I guess, you know, they have their insecurities, and you know your [own] insecurities. (Ms. Dilly)

Ms. Isaiah, resource reading and inclusion teacher. The researcher met with Ms. Isaiah in one of the portable classrooms near the special education department chair's office and special ed office. The classroom appeared to be unused, so it provided a quiet place for a conversation, during which Ms. Isaiah readily shared her belief and commitment to the potential of her students.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Isaiah described her responsibilities as a resource teacher and co-teacher. Similar to several other teachers, she has a dual role (resource teacher and co-teacher) and is responsible for co-teaching in two classes each period and for teaching multiple grade levels.

I am a co-teacher in a general ed class, and I also teach resource reading grades 6, 7, and 8, including reading and English language arts. I am assigned to two classes each class period [when I am assigned as a co-teacher], so I spend 30 minutes in one and then 30 minutes in the other class. (Ms. Isaiah)

Collaboration with other professionals. As a co-teacher, Ms. Isaiah shares responsibilities with the general education teacher to plan and teach the lesson.

There is some time set aside during cluster meetings and department meetings [to plan]. I facilitate the lesson. The general ed teacher does most of the instruction. I'll maybe read a passage or read the questions out loud; I plan the accommodations and modifications. (Ms. Isaiah)

Parent communication. While some teachers talked about the time demands of maintaining parent communication, Ms. Isaiah did not express a need for frequent parent interaction.

In a typical week, I don't need to communicate very often with parents. It varies, but there is time built into the ARDs. With classroom management, I don't have to call parents often for behavior. If I do it right in the classroom, I generally don't have any problems. My classroom is open, and I invite parents to sit in, but I don't have to talk to students very often. (Ms. Isaiah)

Planning and leading ARDs. Ms. Isaiah did not communicate that preparing for ARDs was particularly time consuming for her.

I have 16 students on my caseload, so I monitor their progress and mentor them, speak on their behalf, I do the prep for all my ARDs. It takes about 30 to 45

minutes to prepare for sixth grade ARDS, but eighth grade requires more preparation time. They have more tests, and you have to make decisions about each of them. We add more detail. They also have promotion ARDs. I have 5 or 6 eighth grade students, so I have to send the invitation, attend the ARD at the high school so parents can come to the high school to see what it's like, and to ask questions. (Ms. Isaiah)

Mr. Hernandez, math resource and inclusion teacher. Mr. Hernandez and the researcher ducked into the first quiet place they could find, which turned out to be a corner of the cafeteria following the last period lunch. Lingering wafts of pizza drifted across the room while custodians methodically mopped the floor and wiped the tables. Afternoon sunshine streamed in through a wide bank of windows as the flip-flop of the mop faded into the background.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Mr. Hernandez, like several other teachers on the staff, takes the dual role of resource teacher and co-teacher. He summarized his responsibilities, noting that he teaches 1 sixth grade math resource class with 10 students and co-teaches sixth grade math and reading and seventh grade reading and writing. In all, he co-teaches in 11 classrooms. He also has a caseload of 17 students. He stated, "I help them if they are struggling, help them take notes, give them strategies, sometimes I motivate them, help keep them on track."

Collaboration with other professionals. Mr. Hernandez described his responsibilities related to co-teaching, planning appropriate modifications, and supporting special education students in the inclusion setting.

We have to maintain communication with the general ed teacher. Before and after school, we try to touch base. I cover classes when needed. I always try to keep in close contact. Lesson plans are sent to us, and we modify them for our students. I try to follow their plans. Our kids don't want to feel different. When I'm in the classroom, I move around the room. I don't just stand next to the special ed kids, so they don't feel uncomfortable or pressured. (Mr. Hernandez)

Mr. Hernandez then described the role he typically takes during direct instruction.

When there is a moment, I'll step in and give another perspective. If I notice the need, I join in. Even though it's the same lesson, different teachers will teach it a little differently. If I see the students are not understanding, I'll jump in. (Mr. Hernandez)

Parent communication. Mr. Hernandez places a high priority on maintaining parent communication, using even his weekends to make home visits.

I send ARD invitations, call parents to remind them of the date. I have all their phone numbers in my cell. I try to keep close contact so I can communicate with them about behavior, tutorials. Even on weekends, I spend time with them signing papers, home visits, getting signatures. I know they are busy, and sometimes they don't have transportation. I try to make it as easy as possible for them to be involved.

About 15 to 20 minutes a day is devoted to parents, especially when there is an ARD meeting coming up. Also, if we are planning a transition ARD, which we have to do for students 13 years old. This involves lots of questions about

behavior, chores that they do at home, career choices. Lots of questions to ask the families. (Mr. Hernandez)

Planning and leading ARDs. Mr. Hernandez described his responsibilities related to planning and leading ARDs, pointing out the need to communicate with other teachers as well as the need to prepare and complete the required paperwork. In all, he estimates that it usually takes about an hour and a half to prepare for an ARD.

I am responsible for sending invitations, I get teacher reports on their progress, prepare ARD on EZ IEP [online data input], collect all necessary forms, check if they are LEP [limited English proficient]. Sometimes we have to have a failure ARD, and if they have behavior support, we need a behavior plan, all ARD forms. [It takes] maybe two hours if it's a behavior ARD. If it's simple, not any behavior plan, one and a half to one hour and 15 minutes, assuming nothing unusual. And you have to print out report cards and other forms. So that is assuming you have time to print those out. (Mr. Hernandez)

Ms. Winston, self-contained behavior support teacher. Perhaps the most interesting interview locations took place in a large copy room where industrial size copiers cranked out stacks of student work. The persistent cla-clunk of the copier, the warm smell of the machinery, and the movement of boxes of paper being stacked into corners of the room contributed to the hum and buzz of the room as the researcher and teacher sat at cafeteria-style benches amid the many teachers and support staff who stopped by the busy room.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Winston teaches a behavior support class that currently enrolls five students. Their labels are typically emotionally disturbed and “other health impaired,” such as attention deficit disorder. She is responsible for all core classes. Her students are self-contained, meaning they take all of their core classes with Ms. Winston. She is responsible for lesson plans for math, reading, English, science, and social studies in grades 6, 7, and 8. She does, however, have access to general education plans in those subjects and grade levels.

Parent communication. Ms. Winston spends about 10 to 15 minutes a week on parent communications. Sometimes she makes a phone call; other times she is able to speak with parents when they come by the school.

Planning and leading ARDS. Ms. Winston’s responsibilities related to ARDS include an additional step of the multi-disciplinary review (MDR), as well as typical annual ARDs, behavior ARDs, and failure ARDs. As a result, it generally takes two to three hours of preparation time per ARD. One of the most time-consuming aspects for Ms. Winston is updating a behavior plan, but she reported that only rarely has she had to do so.

Maple Leaf Middle School

Ms. Jones, self-contained life skills teacher. As the researcher joined her in her classroom, Ms. Jones described her responsibilities as a self-contained teacher who delivers instruction to nine students in her life skills class. The room was large and spacious with areas designated for core lessons in reading, English, math, science, and

social studies, as well as an area with appliances and furniture needed to develop skills that will be necessary for daily living. Most of the students are diagnosed with autism or an intellectual disability (ID). A student teacher assisted with instruction, as the paraprofessional who was assigned to the class was out on leave. Ms. Jones is responsible for teaching five core content areas to students in three different grade levels for students that exhibit a wide range of skills.

Student assessment and progress monitoring. The development of the state assessment used to monitor the progress for students in an alternative curriculum, such as those in the self-contained classroom, requires that the teacher design tasks suited to each student. The process is quite lengthy and requires teacher expertise. Ms. Jones' description of the process was similar to that described in the interview held with the self-contained teacher at Frank Luke who has the same task.

The district provides us with the tasks that they're supposed to do, but I have to basically create the activities, and that can be very time consuming because they're tested in the same areas that the regular ed students are tested in. So let's say I have a sixth grader, and they are tested in reading and math, and so for the students here, they're tested in reading and math for sixth grade, but for the reading, there is four objectives that they're being tested on, and so I have to design activities for each objective, and then there are four for math. So each one. And depending on at what levels they're on, like a level 2 or a level 3, they get their initial testing done and then they have to do a generalization activity just to make sure that they get the testing. So if I am working on, let's say,

shapes, and the initial activity is maybe circles, well, the generalization activity may be squares. I just switch up the materials. But that's just sixth grade, and then I have my seventh graders and my eighth graders, and so seventh graders have reading, math, writing, and it's four for each one of those. And then my eighth graders, reading, math, science and social studies. (Ms. Jones)

Collaborating with other professionals. As a self-contained teacher, Ms. Jones collaborates with the teaching assistant assigned to her class. Planning and communicating with this individual is not difficult, as they are together for the majority of the day.

That person [the teaching assistant] is responsible for meeting them in the morning, getting them to the room, and just helps out with various students. Sometimes I may be working with the lower students, and she will teach the lesson to the higher students, and sometimes we'll switch. I will work with the higher students; she will help with the lower students. And she is also responsible for taking them to their elective classes and to lunch, and then bringing them back. (Ms. Jones)

Mr. Smith, inclusion and study lab teacher. The researcher met with Mr. Smith in his study lab classroom. This large classroom had tables set up for students with mild disabilities to complete homework assignments, ask for assistance in organizing their work, and provide a place where their study habits are closely monitored to ensure that they are not falling behind or missing assignments. On the whiteboard are notes regarding assignments and projects from the classroom teachers whose students are

assigned to study lab. Mr. Smith divides his attention between working in the study lab and fulfilling his responsibilities as a co-teacher. His schedule includes co-teaching in English, math, science, and social studies. In addition, he assists students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in study lab for two periods and plans with teachers in the classes in which he co-teaches.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Mr. Smith provided a description of the expectations of his role throughout the day as he moves from class to class. He also shared insight into the various tasks that he assumes in the inclusion classroom, depending on the subject, grade level, and general education teaching partner.

My responsibilities are making sure that my students that are in general education classrooms have the accommodations that have been set for them, that they're getting those in every classroom whenever they're needed. Some of them are receiving modifications as well, and I'm making sure that they're on time and they're not overused [the modifications] in some perspectives. And really just making sure that [students] that have ADHD and stuff that they're staying on task or giving them verbal reminders and non-verbal reminders to stay on task. Really, kind of assisting. There are some days where I'll actually teach up front, but it doesn't happen quite that often. But most days I'm really just worried about making sure that my students are keeping up with everything that's going on in the room. (Mr. Smith)

Mr. Smith described his typical schedule, in which he takes on the dual role of co-teacher and study lab teacher. In addition, he faces the challenges of teaching more than one subject and multiple grade levels. Mr. Smith provided a description of the various approaches he takes in the inclusion setting.

[I begin the day with] study lab, and I've got about seven or eight students that will have homework to do and other projects to work on. And I'm going through making sure that everybody's getting their stuff done with that or assisting them with it, and it'll be from sixth to eighth grade. And it's just kind of giving them assistance in every subject, so you kind of got to know a little bit about everything and trying to make sure that they're handling everything that needs to be done, checking their planners and stuff like that. And then there's third period. That's an off period.

And then fifth period I have math, and then I'll go through there. And in that room, I'm a lot more up. I'm assisting with actually teaching a lot more in that room. And then I have a group of students that I've got sitting in the front of the classroom that, when we get to where the other teacher is doing, like, direct instruction, I'm kind of sitting in front of them making sure that the notes are getting taken. I've got a couple of students that need note-taking assistance in there, so I'll go get their notes and either write them for them and then copy them or have them copied already before I get there. And I'll be pasting them in their composition books for them and making sure they're following along.

Then seventh period is science class, where I'll kind of be going back and forth from here to science, from study lab, because we've got kind of a rowdy study lab group that period. So I have to come in, try to keep them on track, and then go back to the science class. And then again, I've got some of those same students that needed note-taking assistance in science, and that's more of a note-taking kind of class. That's kind of the way he [the general education teacher] runs it, so I have to really, really make sure that they're on top of that. And that's predominantly what goes on that day.

And then the next day would be, like, history, Texas history in the morning, and again in that class, he kind of does a very good job of having notes already typed up for the students and passes them out. So they'll go over them together, and if there's any assignment that they're working on, then I'm going through and maybe reading some passages to my students or something like that, making sure that they're understanding the vocabulary that's in the packages that they're getting, the passages they're getting. Fourth period, that's a planning period.

And then throughout the day I'm planning with teachers as I'm walking by, talking to them and popping in and out of their rooms because I do that a lot. Sixth period, I have another study lab in here, but I think that one is a little smaller, like three or four kids, so I actually like it a lot because you can really, really, really help those students with the stuff that they're working on, stuff that

they need to get done because they get behind a lot, so you've got to keep them on track.

And then eighth period is English, and, again, that's another room where I'm up moving around and teaching and trying to explain stuff in other ways or checking the vocabulary that's coming from the teacher and trying to find a better definition that makes more sense to the kids. And, you know, checking their writing and trying to find steps for them to be better writers. (Mr. Smith)

Mr. Smith described how he varies his support for students, based on their needs.

When I'm co-teaching, most of the time, you know—well, not even most of the time—all the time you're working with all the students, but then I have my kids that I give preferential seating, and I sit them in an area where I can get to them a little quicker, and maybe it's not as much of a distraction. And normally, it's probably about eight maybe, eight out of close to 30 [students]. Some of them work better from the back of the room, so I have some that are higher and lower, and I can kind of spread them out a little bit. But in the math class, we have a U area set up in the front, and when there's certain parts of the instruction where she's [the general ed teacher] on the board and she's going through everything, then I'll just get the chair and just sit right in the middle of the U. And then I'm checking on everybody to make sure that they're following along. (Mr. Smith)

Collaboration with other professionals. Mr. Smith described the approach he takes with his general education teaching partners in planning lessons.

So there's a period every day that's really set up for planning with my teachers, and we use it quite often. I think more likely, we have, like, meetings probably once a week, like a general meeting where we're really going to meet all together. And then, during those off periods, I'll kind of walk in and just see, "Okay, what do we have going on today? What do I need to do? What needs to get fixed? What do we need to be prepared for? And how is so-and-so doing? Maybe we can do this or try this." (Mr. Smith)

Student assessment and progress monitoring. Mr. Smith has a caseload of approximately 20 students. For these students, he is responsible for preparing and leading their ARDs, completing all paperwork related to the ARD, communicating with parents, and updating student goals. In addition, he is responsible for regular progress monitoring, which includes updating the goals every six weeks as an attachment to the report cards.

Meeting social and emotional needs of students. As Mr. Smith co-teaches, he is keenly aware of his students' sense of confidence and intentionally works to support them in feeling capable and comfortable in the classroom.

If somebody doesn't understand, they can say it right there. They don't have to voice it across the room. They can just kind of whisper it to me, and then I can lean in and say, "Well, this means this, and this is how we got to do this." (Mr. Smith)

Ms. McRay, inclusion teacher. Ms. McRay also is a co-teacher at Maple Leaf Middle School. The researcher met with her at a small table in the library. Ms. McRay's

caseload includes 17 eighth grade students. She also supports students in the study lab and co-teaches English, science, and math. The majority of the students she serves are identified as learning disabled or carry a label of “other health impaired,” e.g., attention deficit disorder, autism, dyslexia.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. McRay provided a description of her role in the inclusion classroom. Like other co-teachers, her comments reflected the variety of approaches that special education teachers take in collaboration with their general education teaching partners, the critical importance of their working relationship, and the significance of teacher expertise in a given subject.

It just varies, really, from teacher to teacher. It’s kind of, you know, however the relationship is with that teacher and also the subject. Some subjects I am more comfortable taking the lead in, like English and science; I do a lot more teaching. History, it’s a lot more individual help with the students, so I am really walking around, monitoring, making sure that they’re working and redirecting all of those kinds of things. And math, we kind of switch back and forth, too. (Ms. McRay)

Meeting social and emotional needs of students. Ms. McRay draws on her psychology degree and Masters in counseling to provide extra support for the emotional needs of the students at Maple Leaf. She recognizes the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities and is using her skills to help them in the classroom.

And then, also, just social things, too. You know, like when kids are off task, or when they’re bothering their neighbor, you know, just my presence sometimes,

just standing next to them, they're like, "Oh, yes, I am not supposed to be doing that." (Ms. McRay)

Ms. McRay also helps students in a small group setting.

We have a lot of autistic students and students who are in the general ed classroom but have been identified as having some social skills issues, so we would have a group, and usually we would pull them out during their team time, not during core instruction, and meet for 30 minutes. A lot of years, we've had two groups because we'll have kids with different needs. So maybe a group with higher social skills functioning and lower social skills functioning group, and we meet with about five or six students each and work on different social skills. Do different lessons, and it's been really helpful, and you see a huge difference in the classroom when we do that. . . . At first, they're like, "What is this? I don't want to come to this," and then they're like, "Are we having our group today?" You know they really look forward to it, so it's a good thing. (Ms. McRay)

Parent communication. Ms. McRay generally makes at least several phone calls a day, either in the morning or after school. Often, parents drop by before or after class because they know that Ms. McRay is available. In addition, she answers emails from parents throughout the day.

Planning and leading ARDs. Ms. McRay's caseload includes eighth grade students who are required to have their promotional ARD at the high school they will be attending. Because Maple Leaf is a boundary option/magnet school, most students are not zoned to a particular high school. They come from across the city and are, therefore,

not in a predetermined feeder pattern. The result is that a more complicated decision-making process is often required, and parents frequently call on Ms. McRay as they consider high school options.

We talk about that in the eighth grade ARDs; we ask them where they're zoned, where they're thinking about going to high school, so they start the application process if they're interested in other schools, or if there are schools we think might be a good fit for them. We talk about that, and in eighth grade, we talk about transition goals, so that's a big part of it. (Ms. McRay)

Ms. McRay reported that preparation for ARDs is about 30 minutes in most cases. As she has become accustomed to the online format, the preparation time has been reduced, although some ARDs take longer because they include a behavior plan or an autistic supplement.

Ms. McRay communicated a sense of urgency and commitment to meeting in-the-moment student needs with her summary statement.

All of that is in my day. It's actually non-stop the whole day because I am just, I am doing the IEPs and working with the kids. And then when you see the kids, it's in the hallways, so I am working with the kids, transitioning things: "Okay, get to class on time. Where is this? Do you have this book?" and it's just constant. (Ms. McRay)

Ms. Hill, resource and study lab teacher. Ms. Hill welcomed the researcher into her classroom, which was brightly decorated and filled with visual reminders of reading skills. There were a few rows of desks in the front of the room, with a

whiteboard that displayed notes about the lessons in progress. Ms. Hill teaches resource reading to students in grades 6, 7, and 8 and one class of reading intervention; supports students in the study lab for two periods; and is the case manager for 12 students.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Hill described her responsibilities in the classroom.

You know, it's the whole ball of wax, with everything from lesson plans to IEPs; and one of the biggest responsibilities to me is to set up a class that is extremely structured and one that speaks to the needs of the students. I want to be sure to cover the bases. (Ms. Hill)

Meeting social and emotional needs of students. Ms. Hill also recognized her role in supporting the social and emotional needs of her students.

So part of my responsibility is to make sure that I widen the world for those kids, that we have real discussions about things that pertain to their lives and their interests. So while I am very much responsible for their knowledge, and for their test prep and for their IEP goals, I am also in a way responsible for their world, their education world. (Ms. Hill)

Ms. Marshall, resource English, resource math, and inclusion teacher. Ms. Marshall welcomed the researcher into her classroom. In her first year as a special education teacher, Ms. Marshall is learning to juggle her responsibilities, which include being the case manager for 10 students. Due to the requirements of her alternative certification program, she has an especially difficult schedule, which includes multiple preparations. She teaches English resource to students in grades 6, 7, and 8 and three

classes of resource math. In addition, she co-teaches sixth grade social studies. In sum, she is teaching three subjects and three grade levels, an assignment that would be unheard of among general education teachers.

Responsibilities related to planning and delivering instruction. Ms. Marshall described her responsibilities related to her resource classes.

My smallest class is four, and my biggest class is nine. Those are about the average. So I have very small classes. With the resource classes, I still teach and follow the same curriculum as for the general ed classes, but we just go at much slower pace, and I focus more on the fundamentals and the basics of each objective, which is nice because there is much more one-on-one interaction with the students and just kind of going, like I said, at their own pace. (Ms. Marshall)

Ms. Marshall described her responsibilities as an inclusion teacher, for which she is responsible for helping out during the lesson and implementing modifications.

My role there is following up with each of the students, making sure they're on task and understanding the questions, and so I don't do so much of the lesson planning for that class, just helping during the period. Also, if there needs to be any modifications to the tests, you know, three answer choices instead of four, or sometimes if we have a big test, we'll sit with certain students for their accommodations to receive small group testing. So I will take some of the students and they'll have a smaller group in my classroom where I can read the test to them. (Ms. Marshall)

Student assessment and progress monitoring. Like all special education teachers, Ms. Marshall is responsible for the students in her caseload. She described related responsibilities.

I fill out the paperwork for them. And every six weeks, I update their goals to see their progress. So I have a caseload of those students. I follow the paperwork more closely for those students, but, also, if there is an annual ARD coming up for any of the other students that are in my classes, I update those goals for them, as well. So my caseload is only sixth graders, but if I have a seventh grade student in my class who has an upcoming ARD, it's less paperwork, but I'll still update their goals. (Ms. Marshall)

Planning and leading ARDs. In describing the amount of time it takes to prepare for ARD, Ms. Marshall explained that it takes a little longer because she is fairly new to the process.

I am still learning. So, you know, making sure that it's still online, sometimes there are glitches, and I get an error message and have to go back and kind of see, where did that go wrong. And I still have a lot of questions filling out the paperwork, so I am, you know, mostly every [piece of] paperwork I fill out for at least my personal caseload, I am calling the department chair. But it takes a couple of hours, I would say. I think, too, because I never have two hours of time where I can solely devote to doing all of my paperwork, so it gets spread out in chunks. So I am guessing a couple of hours [in preparation time for each

ARD]. Because I check in with teachers, the other teachers, too, to see if they have any comments or their take on how the student is doing. (Ms. Marshall)

Parent communication. Ms. Marshall described the parent contacts, noting that the range of parent involvement and expectations for ongoing communications varies widely. She has a few cases in which parents expect frequent updates on their students' progress; they will not hesitate to bring questions forward about an assignment, grades, IEPs, or social/emotional needs. A few parents come by class after school during tutoring just to check in; they may also call or email. The bulk of parent communication, however, takes place at the time of the ARD.

Summary of Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

In summary, 12 teachers from Frank Luke and Maple Leaf Middle Schools provided a very thorough and comprehensive description of their day-to-day responsibilities:

1. Descriptions for similar roles (i.e., self-contained, resource, and co-teach) shared many common elements, regardless of the school site.
2. A number of teachers—seven of the 12 teacher participants—have multiple roles. They teach resource, they are co-teachers, and/or they teach a study lab class. Their schedules are further complicated by the fact that both schools operate on a two-day block schedule, meaning Day 1 is not the same schedule as Day 2. In addition, all seven of these teachers are assigned to more than one subject and/or more than one grade level.

3. All of the teachers carry a student caseload, for which their responsibilities include parent communication, progress monitoring, and all tasks related to planning and leading the ARD meetings. These responsibilities require considerable time and teacher expertise. With the exception of the self-contained teachers, the students in the teachers' caseloads may or may not be enrolled in the classes to which the teachers are assigned, increasing the time needed for communication and support.
4. Both self-contained life skills teachers spoke extensively about the enormous amount of time required for them to create the assessment items required by the state.
5. Perhaps the most significant difference between the two school sites is the assignment of the co-teachers at Frank Luke Middle School. The practice on that campus is to assign co-teachers to two classes during a 90-minute time block, with the expectation that the teacher will assist with both classes for at least 30 minutes. The result is that co-teachers may support as many as six or eight classes. Based on their reports, the number of special education students in each class is not large, but the number of classes is considerable.
6. All of the co-teachers described the difficulties in collaborating effectively with the general education teachers. Almost all shared ways in which they try to communicate with the regular education teachers on a consistent basis, but many expressed the challenges of maintaining high levels of ongoing communication, given the demands of their schedule and the logistics of their day.

These detailed descriptions will serve as the basis for the research questions that will be explored in the next sections. Each of the research questions is best understood in light of the teachers' work. The conclusions and recommendations of this investigation are relevant and meaningful only to the extent to which they are aligned to the day-to-day responsibilities of the teachers who are being appraised. Attention will now be directed to the research questions. The quotations used to illustrate the research findings are identified by codes that the researcher assigned to appraisers and teachers to protect their identities.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 is, "How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?" Several conditions must be established, however, before addressing the question, "*Does* the teacher evaluation system identify effective special education teachers?" First, it is necessary to answer the question, "*How* is the teacher evaluation system being implemented?" More specifically:

1. Are the policies and procedures being carried out as they were designed?
2. Are the policies and procedures consistently implemented with all teachers, regardless of their role, their campus, or their assigned appraiser?
3. Are the policies implemented in a manner that reflects the original intent of the design of the teacher evaluation system, i.e., individualized, growth-minded feedback versus minimum requirements for providing teacher observation and feedback?

Listed below are the critical elements included in the teacher evaluation system under this study. These elements were carefully selected, based on documented research, suggesting that a teacher appraisal process that includes these components is more likely to result in a performance management system that accurately identifies effective teachers.

1. Annual: All teachers are appraised every year.
2. Standard classroom observations: Appraisers observe and rate teachers using a standard written protocol.
3. Multiple classroom observations: Two 30-minute observations and two 10-minute walk-throughs are required minimum observations for each teacher.
4. Individualized feedback: Following the observation, teachers receive regular feedback and individualized support.
5. Appraisal cycle: All teachers and administrators participate in a minimum of three conferences designed to guide and support the professional growth of the teacher:
(a) beginning-of-the-year goal-setting conference, (b) mid-year conference, and
(c) end-of-year summative conference.
6. Multiple components: Teachers are evaluated on instructional practice, professional expectations, and student achievement.

The researcher sought to discover whether the teachers at Frank Luke and Maple Leaf Middle School were experiencing these key elements consistently. Each teacher was asked to describe the evaluation process with his or her appraiser. A summary of their responses is below, followed by more detailed explanations.

1. Fidelity to Process: The seven teachers at Frank Luke Middle School named and described the first five elements in the list above, almost without exception. The five teachers at Maple Leaf did the same. Often, the words and phrases used to describe the process were identical. There were no discernible differences between the campuses with regard to the first five elements. This observation represents a strong commitment to the appraiser practices that ensure that the process is consistently carried out with each teacher.
2. Professional Expectations Rubric: With regard to the sixth element, multiple components, there were two observations of note. First was the teachers' reference to the professional expectations component. At Frank Luke Middle School, the administrators require that the teachers keep a binder to demonstrate the extent to which they have fulfilled the requirements found in the Professional Expectations Rubric. Four of the seven teachers mentioned the binder and its purpose. The reference to the professional expectations, however, was very brief, with only one teacher who elaborated. At Maple Leaf Middle School, the Professional Expectations Rubric was not mentioned by any of the teachers.

Although teachers rarely discussed the professional expectations component, it seems evident to the researcher that all teachers are being evaluated on professional expectations, based on the district's appraisal monitoring system and interviews with administrators. The limited number of teacher comments is most likely a result of the greater emphasis being placed on instructional practice rather than professional expectations.

3. Student Achievement: The special education teachers rarely mentioned the third component, student achievement. This fact may at first appear odd, given the national- and state-level controversies related to the inclusion of student performance in teacher evaluation ratings. In this district, however, many special education teachers do not participate in the student achievement component and, in fact, have only two components in their evaluation rating, i.e., Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations. Teachers discussed *student goal setting* (an indicator from the Instructional Practice Rubric) and student achievement in terms of the *bonus reward program* the district offers. However, in terms of student achievement as a component of the teacher evaluation rating system, teachers offered very few comments.

The Senior Manager of Human Capital Accountability provided a further explanation regarding the student performance component, as not all teachers participate in this third component.

The student performance component of the appraisal system is the component that we look at when we consider student achievement, and whether or not the student performance component is going to be included as part of the teacher's overall sum of their rating, appraisal rating. Currently, we do not have 100% of the teachers participating in that component. (Senior Manager)

Some special education teachers participate in the student achievement component, but most of the participants in this study did not participate. The district follows a specific set of criteria to determine which teachers participate, based on their

class assignments and available assessments. Several possible scenarios can be suggested for the student performance component as it relates to special education teachers, although great care must be taken to avoid making generalizations, as each situation is unique and must meet the specified criteria to be considered in the student performance component. For example, resource teachers whose students participate in standard state assessments could have the student performance component included in their evaluation if other requirements were met, such as minimum class size and the availability of multiple assessments for specific subject(s) taught by the teacher. Similarly, self-contained teachers whose students participate in the state alternative assessment could have the student performance component included in their evaluation if similar requirements were met. Co-teachers, however, do not currently participate in the student performance component. Further, special education teachers often carry out more than one role, e.g., serving as both a resource teacher and a co-teacher. It is possible, therefore, that the student achievement component for a special education teacher might be calculated for a portion of the teacher's students, e.g., resource students, while excluding the remainder of the teacher's students, e.g., students enrolled in inclusion classes.

4. Fidelity to Intent: Finally, anecdotal comments throughout the teacher interviews indicated a fidelity to the intent of the process. Many teachers spoke positively about goal-setting process, ongoing communication and feedback with their appraiser, the frequency of classroom observations and follow-up conferences, and the individualized nature of the support they receive.

Teacher Descriptions of the Teacher Evaluation Process

Teachers described the yearlong evaluation process, giving many details to verify the consistency of its implementation. Included here are two examples from teacher interviews that provide a thorough, yet concise summary of their experiences. Both teachers named the key elements, including standard classroom observations, multiple classroom observations, individualized feedback, and participation in the appraisal cycle of teacher-appraiser conferences. A teacher from Frank Luke provided this summary of the overall process.

At the beginning of the year, we choose two areas where we want to grow, and we develop a plan for those areas. I also have beginning-of-year assessments and must do projections for student growth. Pretty soon, we'll do end-of-year evaluations and look at growth of students from the beginning of the year. Also, we have to consider PD [professional development], policies, teacher trainings, getting the 45 hours. We have a binder where we collect documentations for committees, after school, Math and Science Night, Family Literacy, Open House, tutorials—all of that is turned in. There are several observations by the appraisers and the department chair. At least once a week, I receive feedback. The department chair will provide feedback from her iPad; we sign off right then. The appraiser sends it online, and then we sit down at beginning of year, mid-year, end-of-year conference to go over all walk-throughs. They give us a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4. They explain our score and give suggestions on how to improve. (2T6)

A second teacher described the teacher-appraiser dialog that develops over the course of the school year.

We come together, my evaluator and I, we look at the criteria, what we are being measured or being evaluated on, and we select which [areas] we feel that we want to improve in or where we need areas of growth. We select those areas, and those are the areas that he will come in or she will come in and evaluate us on. We have a total of four evaluations, observations per year. We have two 10-minute and two 30-minute. Within those areas, he wants to see, how did I meet that particular criteria. Like I said, the first meeting is going to be that to discuss, “Okay, which criteria do you want to hit this year?” Okay, we do that.

Mid-year, we discuss the two observations that were done prior to our mid-year conference. That mid-conference will then tell, “Okay, this is what we observed.” Of course, we have conferences during our observation time, but that conference we look to see, are you progressing? Are you regressing? Or what are you doing? Where do we need improvement? And then, we have that opportunity to make that up during the second two observations, the 10-minute or the 30-minute. Then we meet on anything else, any documentation, anything, any resources that are needed or how are we progressing on those criteria. (2T2)

These descriptions provided an overall summary of the evaluation process. The next illustrations provide insight into the specific elements of the teacher evaluation system.

Multiple classroom observations. One teacher described her experience with multiple classroom observations.

This year, I have had equal numbers of observations in both settings [resource and inclusion]. And I think that's good. And I think I have had really good feedback from my administrator because I can see where I can try to be more proactive in the general ed class. And it's nice to have my own [resource] class again because it helps me become a better teacher because I can see, "Okay, well I can use this tip or strategy, but I might not use that." And when it goes from management of a classroom to teaching a lesson, you know it [is working]. (2T4)

Individualized feedback. One teacher described the feedback she receives from her appraiser after classroom observations.

We sit down one-on-one. We look at the evidence that he saw for every criteria [in the Instructional Practice Rubric]. If he didn't see it, that's the part that he'll tell me, "I need to see this next time." "Yes, sir, I will. I will make sure that I show you this." So it's very fair. Very fair, like I said; whatever grade he gives me is between the 1 and the 4. He is very fair. If he didn't see it, he will tell me, "I didn't see this, and this is why I gave you this score." Okay, so it's a one-on-one and it's open to discussion. (2T2)

Another teacher described classroom observations and follow-up with the appraiser.

We always have the option to meet face-to-face after he sends the feedback by email. We have a 30-minute observation and a 10-minute walk-through. We have a conference after the 30-minute but not after the 10-minute walk-through.

We meet at the beginning of the year for goal setting. Sometimes we just talk informally. My administrator is very visible. (2T5)

One teacher talked about feedback in terms of looking at student data.

Well, this year, the feedback that I got from my appraiser was concerning the data because a lot of times, when the students take these beginning-of-the-year, middle-of-the-year, and end-of-the-year assessments, we don't get that data.

How are we supposed to know where we're supposed to take the students?

Because we are not privy to that information, and so he said that you need to be more proactive, and I really liked the way the principal actually got a teacher that's very good about explaining the [data analysis] process because I have learned a lot this year about it. They actually break it down into the state standards, and you can see from the data where the student answered the question, their strengths, and their weaknesses. And that's where I needed to grow. (2T4)

Standard classroom observations. Appraisers and teachers are very familiar with the Instructional Practice Rubric, a tool that is used with very high consistency for formal and informal classroom observations. The participants conveyed the sense that the use of the rubric has resulted in a shared vision of effective instructional practices.

One teacher gave this example to describe how the rubric clarifies standard expectations.

[In reference to the Instructional Practices Rubric], I can tell I know the difference between a level, like the level 2 teacher who knows what she is supposed to do but doesn't implement it all of the time. And then a level 3 teacher knows what to

do and implements it but is not student centered. And a level 4 teacher knows what they want to do, and it's student centered. (2T1)

Appraisal cycle. All teachers and administrators participate in a minimum of three conferences designed to guide and support the professional growth of the teacher. These include the beginning-of-the-year goal-setting conference, the mid-year conference, and the end-of-year summative conference, interspersed with coaching and feedback conferences. Several teachers described their experiences in this yearlong process. One stated, “Basically, my goals align with lesson planning. We came together, so we all add rigor to our plans. The goal is to focus on rigor and we have stayed with it during the year” (2T7). Another teacher commented on goal setting and the follow-through provided by the appraiser during the course of the year.

My administrator conducts walk-throughs, we meet for a conference . . . we set goals collaboratively. The goal-setting process is meaningful. It gives me guidance. My administrator gives me feedback and helps me keep on track. I always have access to him. I can talk to him any time. (2T5)

Returning to Research Question 1

We return now to Research Question 1, which is, “How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?” As mentioned, new teacher evaluation systems were designed with the intent that they would effectively differentiate among teachers’ varying levels of skill and expertise. Therefore, *if* the school district has implemented a teacher evaluation system that is aligned to research-based practices that will likely result in a system that accurately identifies effective teachers, and *if* evidence

indicates that the evaluation system is being implemented with fidelity to process and intent, *then* we are prepared to ask practitioners, including teachers and their appraisers, “To what extent do you believe these goals are realized in the teacher evaluation process on your campus?” More specifically, practitioners were asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, does the teacher evaluation system accurately differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers?” Figure 5 below presents a summary of their responses.

On a scale of 1–10, does the teacher evaluation system accurately differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers?											
Scale 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No Response
Teacher Responses		1			2		4*	1			4
Administrator Responses						1	4	1**			2
*The researcher marked 7 for three teachers who said “7 or 8.” **The researcher marked 8 for an administrator who said “8 or 9.” Two teachers declined to respond based on their lack of experience. Two teachers and two administrators declined to give a specific number.											

Figure 5. Responses regarding teacher evaluation system.

Summary of Response Ratings

Most teachers responded positively to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, does the teacher evaluation system accurately differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers?” Among teachers who responded, all but one rated the system a 5 or higher, and five teachers rated it a 7 or 8. No discernible differences were noted in the teacher responses at the two school sites, and both novice and experienced teachers rated the system positively. Four of the five teachers who rated the system a 7 or 8 have more than 10 years in the district. It is quite remarkable that experienced teachers voiced such

confidence in the teacher evaluation system as an accurate means to identify effective teachers.

In analyzing responses by teacher assignment, the researcher saw no clear trends emerge. Three co-teachers rated the system a 7 or 8, one rated it a 5, and three declined to comment. Among teachers assigned to a self-contained classroom, two rated the system a 7 or 8, and one rated it a 5. Two resource teachers rated the system a 7, one rated it a 5, one rated it a 2, and two declined to respond. Some teachers “count” in more than one category because they have dual roles.

With regard to administrator responses, administrators who responded consistently rated the system as effective. Their responses were high; all were 6, 7, or 8, and they were very close together. This is a fairly high rate of agreement, indicating that most appraisers in this research project feel that the system effectively differentiates among teachers. However, it remains unclear as to why some teachers and administrators declined to give a rating.

Explanations for Response Ratings

More interesting than merely the number that the teacher or administrator assigned to the system are their comments and insights. This section begins with quotes from teacher participants, including those who support the process, as well as those who criticize it. They are then followed by administrator perspectives. The question that participants were responding to is, “Do you believe that the teacher evaluation system accurately identifies effective teachers?”

From one of the teachers who did not give a specific number, she offered her opinion, which was positive.

It is an excellent tool, too, like I told you, and especially because of my administrator. I can't speak for anybody else, but my administrator holds me accountable, and he is very fair. "Ms. M, I didn't see this. So because I didn't see this, I am expecting to see this next time." . . . Maybe he is going in there often, because he wants to see if I am implementing it, "Because what I am seeing here, during your evaluation is what I want to see throughout the year." So basically, he is telling me, "Don't give me a dog-and-pony show and then tomorrow be someone different." I am like, okay. That's how I feel him telling me.

So as far as the evaluation, I think it's a definitely important tool. It's hard to tell; the only part that I disagree with is that it's hard to weed out the bad teachers and the good teachers. Like I said, it's within us. We put on a dog-and-pony show, or are you really doing it? Is this really you? . . . We want to really, we really want to see the truth, and because of the type of students that we deal with, wow. We need to be on our toes every day. (2T2)

Teachers also shared their reservations. One teacher criticized the instrument for providing just four levels of teacher effectiveness.

I think [the teacher evaluation system] does [differentiate between varying levels of teacher effectiveness] to some degree, but I'm not sure how effective it is. Because I mean, basically, you're getting a 1 through a 4; it's a small scale. I

don't know how much, you know? I don't know. I don't know how truly meaningful it is. (1T3)

Another teacher criticized the process, sharing her belief that several ineffective teachers still receive good evaluations and that the value of any appraisal tool is in its proper implementation.

You will have these folks that, you walk into their classroom, and you're supposed to have an objective, and that objective has been up there the entire year, but the administrator is so busy because of all the ins and outs of their job that they don't notice that person hasn't changed it. That was the same objective that they wrote in August, but, oh yes, she'll get a good [evaluation], so it's just like there is lot of cloak-and-dagger ways to look good on paper. And then I just feel that, for the most part, it can identify weaknesses if you really have good communication with that administrator and you are really both on the same page as far as trying to help you become a better educator, but I feel like it depends on the individuals. I think that it's just a tool, and it's how you use the tool, both the teacher and the administrator, that determines whether or not it's effective.

So I would give it a 50/50; I would say a 5, because it's just a tool. (2T4)

Another teacher expressed his doubts with regard to the student achievement component.

When it comes to putting a number on whether a teacher is effective or not based on a student's test scores, I don't know how effective that is. I think it should definitely be part of the process, but I don't think it's completely accurate

to determine how effective a teacher is because there is varying levels of students, and sometimes their best is not going to meet the standards that are going to pass. And I don't think that that should determine whether a teacher is effective or not, because maybe the best that kid can do is a 5 out of 10, and that's a huge improvement. (1T5)

The next comments are from administrators. Most of the participants rated the system positively in terms of identifying effective and ineffective teachers, but they also saw the shortcomings or the gaps in the process. One assistant principal shared this perspective:

I would say about a 7, and the reason is I think there are some things that overlap and some things that can be biased. For what we were told, when you rate them [teachers], it is clock time. So when you go in there, and you start at a time and from when you leave, you're looking for these key moments and these key things. So it's not necessarily that a teacher is not doing it, they just didn't do it in that 30-minute time frame or that 10-minute time frame. So that is where it can get a little tricky. However, the good thing about it is that they do give you bulleted points that an ineffective teacher only does this, this, and this. A highly effective teacher should be doing this, this, and this. So it's good in that it gives you actual things to look for. Not so good is when you know that you have a highly effective teacher, but maybe they didn't say this in those particular moments that you're in class. (2A1)

An experienced administrator, who rated the system a 7, suggested several changes to the Instructional Practice Rubric but gave the system high marks overall.

There is enough in the rubric that you can apply it to most things that you see in the classroom and provide feedback on that. There are some things in the rubric, though, that I think should not be in there or, instead of being in two separate categories, they should be one. Some things I think that may not be necessary, and I would say that's probably the only thing that cuts down on the effectiveness of it. . . . But I think generally the tool is well designed; it's a pretty, it's an effective . . . way to give feedback and to appraise teachers. (2A2)

Perceptions of the Components of the Teacher Evaluation System

Next, the researcher sought to uncover the perceptions of teachers and administrators in identifying what aspects of the teacher evaluation system result in a more accurate assessment of the teacher's effectiveness. Because the teacher evaluation system has multiple components, including instructional practice, professional expectations, and student achievement, the question posed to teachers and administrators was, "Which components of the teacher evaluation system do you believe make it possible to most accurately differentiate between varying levels of effectiveness?" Participant responses included references to the (a) Instructional Practice Rubric, (b) levels of performance, (c) the combination of components used to determine a teacher rating, and (d) the student achievement component.

Instructional Practice Rubric. Both the administrators and the teachers made frequent references to the Instructional Practice Rubric and commented on its value as a

tool to identify effective teachers. One teacher described these benefits of the Instructional Practice Rubric:

With looking at the rubric that they give you, you know, 1, 2, 3 or 4, it's pretty self-explanatory what you need to have in order to get that number, which is actually better. That's one of the things that I appreciate. It's kind of like a kid who gets a rubric and they know what they need to get an A, a B, a C, or a D, so I would say, in that way, it's good and it's effective because you know exactly what you need to do to get this actual number. (1T1)

One teacher gave the opinion that the rubric demonstrates whether the teacher has actually implemented effective teaching strategies.

The instructional practice tells us a lot. . . . You can get professional development anywhere, and that's great. I think that's an important component for your professional growth, but are you implementing it? . . . We need to see that in your instructional practice. That shows that, okay, what you learned, you're applying [it]. (2T2)

An administrator shared a similar opinion regarding the value of the Instructional Practice Rubric in providing guidance to appraisers in evaluating teacher performance.

The observation, that piece where it has where you actually have some criteria to look at, all of the criteria that's in the little handbook is also online. And I use that constantly. And I start with a 3 [a teacher that is rated "effective"]. I have some very strong teachers up here. So I start with 3, and then I look to a 4 [a teacher that is rated "highly effective"], and I see a lot of my teachers doing 4 on a

lot of their categories. So . . . when it comes to the observation, it gets a lot more detailed. (1A3)

One administrator gave this perspective on the value of the Instructional Practice Rubric versus the Professional Expectations Rubric.

Well, I think the instructional practice piece, you know, you work with different types of people, and you may have one of those teachers, like, they may be really horrible about paperwork and following policies and procedures, but they will give you a 90 plus percentage every year. You learn to work with those people. You know, so the professional piece I am not saying it's not important. But if they're here, they're doing their job. They're giving me results. I can work with that. I don't feel like I necessarily need to rate that. (2A2)

Levels of performance. One teacher recognized a benefit of the teacher evaluation system to be the various levels of performance that can potentially challenge and stretch even successful teachers.

I think it's good to have a variety of things that they're looking at. I think I would rate it about an 8, and I say that because it's not a perfect system, of course, but it's going to find everybody at some point where they can be high and low, and they won't come out at the bottom of the scale, and I don't think anybody is going to come maxing the scale because we all do need time to grow and develop in certain areas. (2T3)

Combination of components. Participants voiced the belief that the teacher evaluation system's effectiveness relies on the use of a combination of components to

determine the teacher's rating. One teacher stated, "I think it should be a combination [of components]. Data is important, but they need to look at everything combined and not just focus on one area" (1T3). One administrator stressed the importance of data, along with classroom observations.

First of all, for me, you're always looking at data. So you're looking at, how are the kids performing in this class? Is there improvement? Are they showing growth? It's really hard with special ed kids . . . it's so difficult to use anything data-wise to say, this is about her as a teacher . . . because the ultimate goal right there is that they're showing growth. So for my walk-throughs and being able to communicate to [my teacher] that you're doing what I want you to do. You're doing what I need you to do. You're doing what's going to make a difference for the kids, and that is the active teaching, the active listening with the kids; it's being engaged with the kids in the learning. (1A1)

Another administrator who gave her opinion regarding the combination of components was strongly in favor of the use of student achievement data and discussed how her school's past performance in value-added models had demonstrated positive student growth. Although not explicitly stated, it seems that she believes the value-added component is an accurate indicator of effective teachers. She concluded by conceding the fact that no evaluation system can capture all the time and effort that teachers put into their students' success.

I would definitely say maybe an 8. Between an 8 and a 9. We, I think there is a little gap in between there, but not much. We have a high rate on value added

[for the campus]; we have a very highly effective campus. . . . My whole math team was highly effective [according to value-added scores]. Almost the whole English team was highly effective. My special ed team was between highly effective and effective. My science team was highly effective. My social studies team was highly effective, and so I think it correlates well. But I would say about 8, 9, closer to 9. Eight might be measurable for some improvement. Particularly, with the teachers whose students do not take the state assessment, I guess, too, because the curriculum doesn't allow you, so it's kind of gray when it comes to, like, say, a seventh grade history teacher who, the test is not aligned, and they will be using that curriculum. You know the evaluation system may not see everything that we do. It [the teacher evaluation system] can't capture the 120 hours they are pulling before school or after school, or that they have the lowest group of kids coming in, or, you know, maybe, you know, they capped out at seventh graders. . . . So when I say that there is gaps, it's in little areas.

(2A3)

Student achievement. Research in the field of teacher evaluation systems contains many references to the incorporation of student achievement in the teacher's evaluation. Even though this component is not implemented with many of the special education teachers in this district, the administrators and teachers offered their opinions of its value in identifying effective teachers. One of the administrators described trends that he had observed in standardized testing results and advocated for an approach that recognizes student growth rather than student achievement.

Measures of student progress, I think, again, it depends on what you teach. For example, sixth grade here is an Achilles' heel, sixth grade reading. As it is across the district. Across the state. I think we can't just look at those teachers as pass or fail. You know, unfortunately, this is how the system is designed with the state. We have no control over that. And so I think progress for those teachers is probably more important to measure. Maybe you didn't get this kid up to passing, but he came in at a third grade level and you brought him up to a fifth grade level or something like that. He still may not be ready to pass the state assessment, and maybe by next year he will be up there, but you made him grow two grade levels. And you can't discount that. (2A2)

Questions related to measuring student achievement for students with disabilities are well documented. Teacher participants in this research study voiced their concerns that standardized test results may not accurately reflect their student's academic progress. One teacher contrasted his confidence in the Instructional Practice Rubric to his confidence in the student achievement component.

I would give the [Instructional Practice] Rubric an 8 and the measures of student performance a 5. It's not the student's fault. They can all learn, however; if you know the needs of each student, you know it's going to be a little different for special needs children. . . . Our kids have trouble remembering from Monday to Wednesday. . . . I can help them to grow, but it's going to be slow growth. You have to remember what they are working on. Understanding the student, that's the role of the educator. (2T5)

Another teacher voiced a similar concern: “I have a student that is MR [mentally retarded]. They might show growth, but it may be slow growth. That’s a concern that my evaluator will be affected by those types of kids” (2T6).

In addition to the concerns regarding student performance measures, one teacher expressed his belief that the differences between various classes and the practice of grouping low students together may have a negative impact on student achievement. He was concerned that class assignments for which teachers have no control may potentially affect teacher evaluation ratings if they are determined by student achievement scores.

There are clusters of teachers, usually two reading teachers in a cluster. One might have the higher kids, and other teacher is going to have the lower kids. The teacher with the higher kids is going to have the higher appraisal. I see that fairly often, and a lower score will affect their evaluation. . . . There is not an impact on the co-teacher, but for resource class, that’s different. (2T6)

One assistant principal shared concerns in the alignment between student achievement data and observed instructional practices, leading her to question the negative impact of standardized testing.

What I've noticed with teachers and evaluating, if we evaluate a teacher, and we go into their classroom and we see that, gosh, this teacher is really struggling. This teacher really needs a little bit more assistance. And then, when the data comes out, the kids do a great job. And I'm going to use sixth grade as an example. Sixth graders come in, and they still really want to do a very good job for you, and they really still have that elementary mentality. We've got to get this

done; we need to know what to do. So you have those sixth graders who are typically going to score well. They're going to do well. And so, even though this teacher had not such a great year, and you didn't think that they really performed at their best, but the data doesn't reflect that.

But then, by the time you get to seventh grade and eighth grade, it changes a little bit. And so, and it could work the same way. Even teachers who you think, oh, man, this teacher's got it. I mean, they're in here asking all these questions. The kids are answering questions, and they're all participating; they're engaged in the learning. And then when you get the data, the kids didn't grow much. So to be honest with you . . . it just depends. I think the way we look at the data definitely needs to change. What we're looking at, there needs to be a change. I really believe that because it just doesn't match what we're seeing in the classrooms to what the data is showing. . . . They're not focusing a whole lot on the whole child. They're focusing on, "I've got to get my kids to pass the state assessment. What are those objectives?" And I think the kids are missing out on other things that they should be learning. So until we do something about our testing, I just think this is just going to be ongoing. (1A4)

A final word came from one of the teachers as she described the system as a whole, recognizing not only the importance of an effective process but also looking at the teachers' true motivation.

I believe that it is a fair system. I do; I think that it's fair. I don't have a problem with it, and, I mean, that's just my opinion. I don't have a problem with it at all.

I know some teachers may say that it's not fair that it doesn't encompass everybody's abilities across curriculum and which curriculum areas are most important. The importance for me is my students. I didn't get in education because I wanted to get a great stipend. That's a bonus, yes, but I got into education because I wanted to help students with special needs and disabilities.

(2T3)

Summary of Research Question 1

The critical findings for Research Question 1, "How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?" are summarized as follows:

1. The tools and processes of the teacher evaluation system are being implemented with fidelity with all teachers.
2. Teachers are experiencing the teacher evaluation system as intended by its purpose to provide ongoing individualized support for teachers.
3. The majority of the administrators and teachers who responded to the question, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system to accurately identify effective teachers?" provided a positive response. As a whole, they believe that the teacher evaluation system accurately identifies effective and ineffective teachers.
4. Among the components, teachers and administrators shared the belief that the Instructional Practice Rubric was a very useful tool for identifying effective teachers. They further believed that multiple components resulted in more-

accurate teacher ratings. Teachers and administrators had mixed opinions, however, on the value of the student achievement component.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 is, “How do teacher evaluation systems take into account the differences between general education and special education teachers?” To answer this question, the researcher asked both teachers and administrators to describe their experiences in implementing the teacher evaluation system and its application to special education teachers with the intent of gaining insight into the following questions:

1. Do special education teachers perceive that their appraisers follow the same processes for evaluating general education and special education teachers?
2. Do administrators find it necessary to adjust the tools and processes of the teacher evaluation system for special education teachers? If so, under what circumstances?
3. Do teachers and administrators perceive that the unique roles and responsibilities of special education teachers are accounted for in the teacher evaluation system?
4. Do teachers and administrators perceive that the teacher evaluation system is equally effective in evaluating general education and special education teachers?

Applicability of Teacher Evaluation System to Special Education Teachers

As the researcher met with teacher participants, all 12 teachers were asked, “Do you believe that your appraiser follows the same teacher evaluation process for general education and special education teachers?” All teachers answered affirmatively and without hesitation. Almost all of their responses were similar to that of one teacher, who

stated, “I believe that she does. I mean, she does the same process. She uses the same form, provides the same feedback, so yes” (1T1). Another responded, “I think, at our school, it’s probably the same for special ed teachers; I believe they [the appraisers] have the same expectations as [for] a general ed teacher” (2T6).

When teachers were asked, “Do you believe that your administrator modifies or adapts the process for the special education classroom?” they responded with phrases such as, “She kind of understands,” or, “He may have accommodated for some things,” and, “We talked about how the special ed piece fits.” One teacher shared the following account, in which she stated that the appraiser modifies the process based on her understanding of the student population:

[My appraiser] has been in special education, so she kind of understands the typical behaviors that you would see in a classroom and [when] I am redirecting and correcting the students. It’s not something I am just allowing to happen because the student has a disability. But she does understand. I don’t think that’s really modifying. But she does kind of understand where the students are and what I am working with, so I would say that she modifies it with a little bit more of an understanding with my students. (1T1)

Another teacher described how his appraiser has made adjustments by taking his word for something, rather than requiring a strict piece of evidence.

Sometimes they [the appraisers] may have accommodated for something by literally maybe taking my word for something. And I think that I would just say

they've accommodated sometimes, and then sometimes just letting me bring proof of something to them. (1T2)

A third teacher gave the following account of her appraiser's sensitivity to special education:

It's the same process for [appraising] as far as I know for both general ed and special ed, and I haven't seen any variation except for the year I did work with [the special ed administrator with special ed experience], and it was still the same process. It's just that we talked about how the special ed piece fits into that and things, you know, the different kinds of things that we do. (1T3)

When the researcher asked the administrators whether they followed a similar process to appraise both general education and special education teachers, they all said yes. Following this question, the researcher asked, "Do you ever find it necessary to modify the process for a special education teacher?" The administrators' responses to the second question were very similar, even though they used different phrases or descriptions. One stated, "I tweak it a little." Another replied, "I follow the same process but I look for different things."

In response to the question, "Have you ever modified the process in any way for special ed teachers?" one administrator answered that she did not. Then, as she elaborated about a specific area of difficulty in applying the Instructional Practice Rubric to a special education classroom, she contradicted her earlier statement by saying, "So that's one way that I modify it." Finally, one administrator responded, "Yes, I have [modified the process], and I'm going to tell you [how and why]."

The administrators gave explanations as to why they felt it was necessary, at times, to modify the process and provided specific examples. One administrator explained the reasons for the modifications, stating, “We are very fair with our teachers.” Another responded, “I give them the benefit of the doubt.” Administrators expressed a desire to provide a fair and meaningful evaluation process for all teachers. One administrator offered insight into the appraisal process and the role that communication can serve in bridging the gap to meet the needs of special education teachers:

We do use the same tool for both general ed and special ed, and, just like special education has certain modifications, there really aren’t any modifications for the special ed teachers when it comes to the actual tool in itself. But I think that’s where the conversations and goal setting and planning and just being present in the classrooms will allow you to actually give a true evaluation of the teacher’s performance. (1A2)

Teachers and administrators identified a variety of potentially challenging scenarios, which included difficulties in the following areas: (a) appraising co-teachers, (b) capturing roles and responsibilities, (c) recognizing the importance of supporting social and emotional needs of students with disabilities, (d) applying the Instructional Practice Rubric, and (d) determining teacher ratings. The following examples illustrate difficulties in each of these areas and provide illustrations of the ways that participants have addressed these dilemmas.

Appraising Co-teachers

The most common challenge in applying the teacher evaluation system to special education teachers was the difficulty in following the appraisal guidelines when evaluating the co-teacher. All of the administrators who appraise co-teachers described the responsibility as especially troublesome. They provided details and gave examples of the specific dilemmas they face in following the policy. They also described the ways in which they have adapted the system to meet their needs. In addition, the co-teachers gave examples of the problems they encounter through the evaluation process.

Evaluating the co-teacher in the inclusion setting creates a unique set of circumstances for the teacher and the appraiser. The Instructional Practice Rubric is based on the assumption that the teacher who is being evaluated is actually leading the classroom lesson. This assumption, however, does not hold true for many inclusion classrooms. The co-teachers who participated in the study reported that they rarely lead the classroom lesson. As one teacher stated, “There are some days where I’ll actually teach up front, but it doesn’t happen quite that often” (1T2).

In their role as facilitator, as described by the teachers, they typically monitor students, make sure they are on task, assist with note taking, plan and implement accommodations, ensure that modifications are appropriate and are being used, assist with small-group instruction, and circulate to assist students one-on-one. These responsibilities, while critical for the success of the co-teach model, make the appraiser’s task of completing two 30-minute and two 10-minute unannounced observations very difficult.

The difficulties generally fall into three categories. First, appraisers may visit the classroom for the purpose of evaluating the special education co-teacher, but find that they cannot evaluate the teacher on some criteria in the Instructional Practices Rubric because the special education teacher is not leading the lesson, but is facilitating. A second challenge is that some of the specific criteria that apply to a teacher who is leading the lesson are difficult to apply in the case of the co-teacher who is facilitating. For example, co-teachers are infrequently involved in lesson planning and rarely involved in developing units of study or classroom assessments. It is difficult to evaluate whether the teacher has facilitated an organized, student-centered, objective-driven lesson if he or she is assisting and monitoring students rather than presenting information and leading student participation.

Finally, the quality of the feedback and coaching provided to special education teachers from their appraisers is greatly diminished when the appraiser is observing a lesson that is atypical to a particular classroom setting. In other words, if the co-teacher is leading the lesson for the purpose of being appraised even though the co-teacher almost never takes the lead, the value of the feedback is lost. These three challenges are elaborated below by the teachers and the appraisers.

Scheduling a time to observe the co-teacher lead a lesson. The challenges in finding a time when the co-teacher is leading the lesson so that the appraiser can complete the required observation are described by the co-teachers from both campuses. One co-teacher described how her appraiser checks with her to see whether she will be leading the lesson:

The same evaluation process is taken for me and the general ed teachers. It's just that some of the information can't be found the same ways. . . .They [the appraisers] might need to ask, "Today are you teaching?" because that doesn't happen all the time, like the other teachers will when they can just pop in whenever. (1T2)

Another co-teacher described her actions when she realizes that her evaluator has come to observe her teach and she is not leading the lesson.

That's a challenge because if you don't know when somebody is coming in; it could be a time when I am teaching directly or not. And when they're evaluating, they're looking for that, then we might have to change things where I see they're here, so I am going to start teaching this, but it wasn't exactly what we were doing in the first place, so that's kind of challenging. (1T3)

A third co-teacher added this explanation regarding the difficulty of the classroom observation:

If you are not teaching the lesson, then, yes, it could be difficult. They [the appraisers] could have missed the moment. They are looking for certain things. Questions, classroom management, we have to quickly jump into the lesson. I usually offer a mixture of small group. One-on-one. They know we are not going to be teaching the whole time. (2T6)

Finally, one co-teacher described the challenges of sharing the instructional lead and the impact of this challenge on the teacher evaluation process.

A lot of times, it's difficult. I can't set the lesson for the class. It's already set. I have to follow along. . . . Depending on the [co-teach] model that we practice in the classroom, we respect that that's the teacher's classroom. She is the one on record, so, yes, many times it's not, and I don't blame the teacher because they feel like, "Okay, this is my baby; I have to take care of my baby." So having to go in and say, "Move aside, let me help you." No, I don't want to do that, either. So in times like that, depending on the teacher, I think it would be fair to modify the evaluation process. (2T2)

The administrators also described the difficulty in scheduling the co-teacher's observation, as most have found it necessary to communicate to the teacher in advance their intent to observe in their classroom, even though appraisals, by policy, are unannounced. Their reasons for making these adjustments were consistent and well articulated. One administrator described how he gives his co-teachers a heads-up.

So what I do, depending on what we have going on that week, I'll give the teacher a heads-up. I'll say, "This week I am coming in, and I need to see this," and I will also let the teacher whose class I am going in to let them know, as well. And it honestly depends on if we're getting close, like, if we have an assessment [deadline] coming up or, you know, a major benchmark coming up. But I'll usually give the teacher and the co-teacher a heads-up and say, "Hey, I am coming in the classroom this week. I'll be looking for a few things," or something like that. And depending on the relationship that is built between the co-teacher and the teacher, sometimes it's not always needed.

We do have some co-teachers who work very well, and they plan with their teachers, and then we have some teachers who more so kind of take the lead, and the co-teacher moves around the classroom helping their students as well as other students. . . . If I go in and I see them just kind of helping one or two students and I am listening for verbal clues, I will tell them, like, “Hey, I need you to go talk because I am looking for certain things.” . . . Or, “I am looking for this particular instructional practice,” and they usually are, like, “Okay, that’s fine.” So I give them a heads-up. (2A1)

He continued to elaborate on the specific difficulties of conducting the observation if the co-teacher is not taking the lead.

I find it challenging at times to find certain things [criteria in the Instructional Practice Rubric], which is why I kind of give them a heads-up. . . . I need you to speak up more, and they have a relationship with the teacher and with the students, so it’s not hard. It’s just depending on the co-teach model that they’re using in class. So at that particular moment. So maybe if a teacher does the first half of the class and then the second half of the class, I just need to make them aware: “Hey, I am going to be in the first half.” Or, “Hey, I might need you guys to switch it up this day when I come in because I actually need to hear you verbalize a few things so that I can rate you.” So it’s different, whereas if I walk into a regular ed classroom, they’re going to be doing this regardless. (2A1)

Another administrator described the same challenges in using the rubric to evaluate a co-teacher who is facilitating rather than leading the lesson.

It's very hard to evaluate, for example, a co-teacher using the rubric. A lot of the times, unfortunately, in the case of one teacher [that I appraise], she has a resource class, so I can actually watch her teach a lesson, so it's very easy to apply in that sense. But when I go see her in the classroom [as a co-teacher], it's not as easy because, as much as we would like to have that model of co-teacher where both teachers are simultaneously teaching and working with each other so you could actually observe that teacher teaching, it's very difficult, and there is not that many cases where teachers are working that closely together. So what you have to do is you have to get next to the teacher, and you have to listen to him or her help somebody, and you have to try to find ways to make that apply to the rubric. (2A2)

The administrator went on to give this example of the potential negative impact on the co-teacher who is not leading the lesson:

There was one time that I observed [a co-teacher]; it might have been on just a walk-through, where I just kind of sat and listened to her help kids, but on the 30-minute observation, I can't do that for 30 minutes. "I need you to teach because I won't get what I need and then I am going to have to mark you down for lack of evidence." (2A2)

The administrator continued to describe the difficulties in applying the Instructional Practice Rubric to co-teachers if they are not leading the lesson, and then concluded by stating his opinion that the current appraisal process is probably not the best way to evaluate co-teachers.

And a lot of time I have to tell, you know, my co-teacher, which this isn't best practice because anybody could tell somebody I want to come see [appraise] you, and, of course, they're going to give you the best that they have. But I have to tell them, "I need you to be ready, I am coming to see you and need you to be, you know, I need you to really work with the teacher or I need you to design the lesson for this period." Because that's the best way I can make this connection with this rubric, for example, *I-9: Implements discipline management procedures*. Well, if the co-teacher is just in the classroom, and the teacher of the classroom is the one that's really doing the majority of redirecting students or whatever it may be, then I can't really give credit to the co-teacher. A lot of things have to be observed.

Or if, for example, on I-7, it has to be articulated: "*Teacher communicates and reinforces the expectation that students will meet annual learning goals and connects this achievement to their long-term or personal goals.*" Like that's such a hard stretch for a regular teacher. Like that's one of ones I think is just ridiculous. You know, the idea is good, but the application part of it is just very, very difficult. And so it says, "*Teacher encourages student to work hard at mastering lesson objectives and persists when faced with difficult material.*" So I need to hear you say to that kid, "Come on; I know you can do it." So there are certain things, it's just, it's very hard to capture. . . . So I wouldn't say it's probably the best way to evaluate a co-teacher. It's much easier with the resource classroom. You probably could do it with the behavior

teacher, too, because they are teaching lessons as well, but the co-teacher one, it's just a very hard stretch. (2A2)

A third administrator told how she handles the challenge of appraising a co-teacher, noting that some teaching partners share the instructional lead more easily than do others.

We are very fair with our teachers when it comes to evaluation. I will tell you, it is not a one set model because every team works differently. We have some really great teachers, like Ms. Clines. She just works fantastic with her team, and they feel very comfortable with her background. You will catch her team teaching a lot. So when you walk in, that's not an issue, right, because she goes back and forth, and the teacher releases that, it's more flow to it, kind of, and allows her to teach. So when you're evaluating her, it's really easy.

And then there are other teachers where it's harder for them to release their time to their co-teachers. So those are the teachers where we have to say, "I am coming in between X and X. You need to make sure you stick with your teachers and let them know that I need to evaluate you. We need you to take more charge because I want to give you a fair assessment, and I don't want to see you just walking around the room. I need you to do all of the components." So when it's one of those relationships where they [co-teachers] work under it, it doesn't work if they [general education teachers] don't quite release all of it. We don't worry about them putting on a show. The results show up at the end

of the day. . . . If I can't catch the teacher teaching enough, then I need to ask the teacher to lead the class. (2A3)

Two administrators spoke of the difficulty in completing the required 30-minute observations in the co-teach classroom, as compared to the required 10-minute observations. When faced with this challenge, one administrator shared his solution for a teacher who is assigned a co-teach role as well as a resource class. He plans which observations will be for 30 minutes and which will be for 10 minutes and identifies the classroom setting that is best suited for the observation.

As far as seeing them with the teacher, co-teaching, I, on a personal level, it becomes very difficult to do a 30-minute observation in co-teaching. So I do 10 minutes at the most on that. When I see them in their [resource] classroom by themselves, then I do the 30 minutes. As to how do I decide? I do several 10 minutes, so you know I give them all the feedback. I only do one 30-minute unless I saw something missing or something negative, then I will go back and do another 30-minute [observation]. (2A4)

Another administrator who faces the same difficulty told how he finds it necessary to make multiple classroom visits to complete the teacher evaluation rating.

There is a difference between a regular teacher and a co-teacher. You want to see the whole [lesson] cycle, you're going to have to come in more than one time [for the co-teacher observation]. As an administrator, you might need a couple of visits. You might have to do that 30-minute and then the 10-minute to see it all. (2A3)

Applying the Instructional Practice Rubric to the co-teacher. While both the teachers and administrators generally find the Instructional Practice Rubric to be a very helpful guide in describing and evaluating effective teaching behaviors, participants named five criteria from the Instructional Practice Rubric that they find difficult to apply when appraising the co-teacher. These included one criterion from the planning section and four from the instructional section. The reasons for the difficulty are, again, based on the fact that the co-teacher typically takes the role of facilitator, and the general education teacher takes the lead in planning and delivering classroom instruction.

With regard to *PL-3: Designs effective lesson plans, units, and assessments*, one teacher described the difficulty in attempting to match their practices to the indicators in the rubric. Like the other co-teacher participants, the teacher described a process where the general education teacher is responsible for developing units of study and weekly lesson plans. For example, the Instructional Practice Rubric sets the expectation that the teacher will select learning objectives, sequence lessons, plan appropriate pacing, and align instruction to assessment. None of the co-teacher participants is responsible for these tasks. They are expected to review the teachers' lesson plans and to make modifications appropriate for their students, but the indicators in the rubric do not match the responsibilities of the co-teacher.

One co-teacher described how the planning criteria in the Instructional Practice Rubric is not well matched to the actual lesson planning process of the general education and special education. She explained how she submits lesson plans to meet the

requirements of the system, even though they are simply a copy of the lesson plans that the general education teacher has already submitted.

I am not sure that most people completely understand what co-teachers do. You know, they probably have a brief overview of it, but I am not sure they completely understand what our roles and responsibilities are and that maybe some things don't quite fit into the evaluation piece. And because we do plan with the teachers, but the teachers, the core teachers, come up with the lesson plans. We have input into them, we meet with them, and that's part of that cluster meeting stuff, and it could happen maybe at the last 10 minutes of class; we say, "Hey, let's tweak this, I think these kids need this," and it's constant. It's ongoing, working on lessons and changing it. "Well, this didn't work in this class, what can work better in the next class?" And so we're constantly doing that, but it doesn't fit exactly with what they're [appraisers] looking for . . . so now I just send the same lesson plan again, which seems like kind of a waste of time because it's already been sent [by the regular ed teacher]; but, you know, it's little things like that you just do, I don't know. But I don't think it quite works for a co-teacher. (1T3)

One administrator, after reading through all of the criteria in the Instructional Practice Rubric, identified four criteria as being difficult to apply to the co-teacher in a classroom observation. Her statement, "It's hard when it's not your classroom," is very revealing because it conveys the message that the classroom belongs to the general

education teacher, not the co-teacher. Similar sentiments were expressed by others, even if not so explicitly. An administrator, with regard to the four criteria, stated:

1. *PL-3: Designs effective lesson plans, units, and assessments.*

That's . . . difficult because, typically, our co-teachers don't do lesson plan design. So that is difficult.

2. *I-1: Facilitates organized student-centered objective-driven lessons.*

That, too, is a little difficult because, a lot of times, our co-teachers are not the ones doing [leading] the lesson.

3. *I-5: Maximizes instructional time.*

That, too, might be a little difficult because it's not their classroom.

4. *I-9: Sets and implements discipline management procedures.*

I think that's fine, again, but when it's not your own classroom. Again, I think it can become challenging when it's not a resource class; you're a co-teacher going into somebody else's class. (2A6)

One final example from the Instructional Practice Rubric is *I-8: Students actively participate in lesson activities*. One administrator shared the following concern:

Where it's not their [the co-teacher's] classroom, there are some things that you aren't going to see. So you're not going to necessarily see how they engage those students in the class because it's the [general ed] teacher's responsibility to engage a student. (2A1)

Providing authentic feedback. For a teacher evaluation system that is intended to provide ongoing support and coaching for teachers, it is essential that the appraiser

observe the teacher's delivering a typical classroom lesson in an authentic setting. In the case of the co-teacher, when the observation has been purposely scheduled in advance to meet the requirements of the teacher evaluation process, the lesson loses its authenticity, and the value of the feedback is diminished. One administrator explained the challenges of conducting the required observations with the co-teacher and pointed out the lost opportunities for authentic feedback and coaching.

We have to schedule a time, or they have to schedule a time, so the co-teacher knows and they're prepared. "Yeah, they're going to come in." Everybody else, we just walk in and do the evaluations. So this is more scheduled, in a way. So that's kind of a down piece because we want to go in and see teachers just in their natural. But, I think, once they get the lesson scheduled, there is meaningful feedback that can come out of it, like pacing well, but it's not authentic because typically they won't ever take the classroom and command the classroom. It's not authentic feedback. It's helpful but it's not going to help them grow because most of the time they will never be teaching the class. (2A6)

She concluded, "If there's a way to create a system that could target exactly what co-teachers are doing in the classroom, I feel like that might be more meaningful."

Capturing Roles and Responsibilities

The researcher asked both teachers and administrators, "Do you believe that the teacher evaluation system captures the unique roles and responsibilities of special education teachers?" The teacher responses were mixed. A few teachers answered affirmatively. One stated, "For the most part, yes" (2T6). Another responded, "Yes, I

think so” (2T5). However, one teacher felt as though the evaluation does not reflect all that teachers are asked to do.

Probably not, probably not. . . . It’s just a lot, and you come to, I guess, a normalcy with it, you just kind of roll with it, and even though it doesn’t reflect or they [the appraisers] don’t understand, or they don’t see everything that we have to do, we still have to do it. (2T3)

Another teacher shared a similar perspective, noting that responsibilities such as leading ARDs, overseeing case management, and maintaining parent contacts may not be adequately captured in the evaluation process. Although the Professional Expectations Rubric includes criteria, such as *PR-1: Complies with policies and procedures at school*, *PR-5: Collaborates with colleagues*, and *PR-7: Communicates with parents throughout the year*, the actual expectations for special education teachers extend beyond what is described in the rubric. Moreover, these responsibilities are extremely important for their success in meeting student needs.

It [the teacher evaluation instrument] doesn’t account for all the differences in special ed and general ed teachers and what we do. It seems like there might be more-specific criteria for special ed teachers. Because there is a lot of other things that go into it, like the ARDs and the case management and the parent contact that maybe all of the evaluators don’t see. (1T3)

Interestingly, one of the most compelling arguments in highlighting the unique roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers for the evaluation system did not come from a teacher, but from an administrator. He provided vivid examples of the

responsibilities required of a special education teacher, the time demands placed on the teacher, and the expertise required to carry these responsibilities out successfully.

I don't think it's [the teacher evaluation system] able to capture everything.

Just to give you an example, Mr. Hernandez, you know he has his caseload, his group of kids that he monitors and assists. In addition, he co-teaches, you know, and he is in a classroom. So he may have only one or two kids in that class where he is responsible for co-teaching. In addition to that, he has to prepare his own lesson plans for his class. So you know that he only has two classes, but, nonetheless, you know, he has to study the lesson plan of the teacher who he is co-teaching with, so that's stressful. He has to learn the content. Then he has to take that same content and find ways of adapting and modifying it, you know, differentiating it for his own students, preparing the class.

Sure, he has conference periods, of course, where he can rest, but he has to do all of the paperwork for special ed. You know, he has to prepare for the ARD. Make sure he collects data from all of the teachers. Make sure he has been successful in scheduling the parent to come in, which is very difficult most of the time. So securing the parent meeting, securing the data from the teachers, the feedback from the students regarding their grades or behavior, whatever the case may be, or both. In addition to that, prep up the work, be able to find a teacher who is able to attend the ARD, that all falls on him as well. And the same thing with Ms. Dilly, of course.

And in addition to that, so, of course, he has to spend that one hour in the ARD sometimes, so sometimes we're looking at three ARDs in a day. So whatever planning he had in mind for his lesson is going to have to be after school now, or before school. Whatever support the teacher had requested at that moment is now on hold because Mr. Hernandez can't be there because he has to attend an ARD. Even after the ARD, he has to complete the paperwork, put the paperwork together, and make sure the paperwork is done. So all of that doesn't fall anywhere near the appraisal system. I mean, at the most, you know, following school policies, you know, PR-1 and stuff, participating in stuff, so, very limited. (2A4)

After enumerating the specific responsibilities that the special education teachers take on, the administrator stated that the teacher evaluation system, while helpful, is not always well suited to the needs of the special education teacher.

And so I don't believe the appraisal system captures everything. I believe it is useful and helps us to have some checks and balances. And I think, you know, it has helped a lot, but I think it still has a lot of room for improvement, and a lot of things are missing from there, such as dealing with special ed teachers. (2A4)

Even though this administrator rated the teacher evaluation system a 7 in terms of accurately identifying effective teachers, he said that he would rate the system a 5 in terms of special education teachers, given the differences in content, caseload, and student populations.

I know both of them [general education and special education] are teachers, both of them are responsible for teaching the content, but, I mean, they're not necessarily both apples. I mean, both kids aren't, you know, type of populations are not the same level. They don't have the same playing field. So I think it's a little bit different. . . . They don't necessarily deal with the same issues, nor the same content, nor the same caseload. (2A4)

Another administrator came to a similar conclusion, noting that the tools and processes are not well suited to appraising special education teachers: "I really think that they need to find a different tool for special education teachers . . . so I wish they would find some other tool that would assist them in getting the ratings that they should" (1A4).

Recognizing the Importance of Supporting Social and Emotional Needs

Two participants pointed to the important and often-overlooked role of the special education teacher to support the social emotional development of students with disabilities. In the Instructional Practice Rubric, these responsibilities are found in *I-9: Sets and implements discipline management procedures* and *I-10: Builds a positive and respectful classroom environment*. While these skills are critical for the success of all teachers, they often take on even greater importance in the special education setting. One administrator explained the importance of the teacher's skill in managing discipline and creating a positive classroom environment.

Those children definitely have to have consistency. They have to feel safe. They have to like their teacher because they'll be set off, and it's not just behavior problems, it's significant issues. They refuse to walk in the classroom, and you

can't get them in. You physically can't get them in, but you can avoid all of that if you know how to work your classroom. (1A3)

She continued to discuss the importance of teaching, encouraging, and recognizing student growth in social skills development.

A big thing is social skills with those [self-contained] kids, too. If they're growing a little bit academically, they may have topped out. You know their IQ is low. They have topped out, but their social skills are great, and they can follow a routine of a classroom, they can follow directions, you can send them on an errand. Those are all huge. (1A3)

One teacher also wondered why schools do not track data on student progress in social and behavior skills as closely as they track academic progress. Monitoring student progress in social emotional growth is a critical responsibility of the special education teacher that is rarely reflected in the appraisal.

Sometimes that data, the data tracking can be a little difficult, too. We do that, and I have all of my data for the special ed students, and actually all of the students, because I get that from the other teachers as well, but that's what most evaluators are really looking for is data tracking. Data, data, data. So I do that, but there is just so much more in special ed than that that you can't fit into data, you know? Like, so many social and behavioral aspects of working with the kids, and if I see a tiny bit of progress with one of the students, I get really excited. And it doesn't really compare to, I don't know. (1T3)

This teacher also told about a small group she leads who meets to help autistic and behaviorally challenged students to develop social skills. She pointed out that her effort to support students in social and emotional development goes largely unnoticed in the teacher evaluation system.

Most years, I have had a social skills group that I fit into the day during one of my conference periods or something, you know, like, all of these things we do, that's not part a part of [the teacher evaluation system], you know, those type of things should be included for special ed teachers. (1T3)

Applying the Instructional Practice Rubric

When the researcher asked participants whether there was any aspect of the teacher evaluation process they found difficult in applying to special education classrooms, they often spoke about a criterion from the Instructional Practice Rubric *I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills*. Seven participants, including teachers and administrators, discussed the challenges of applying this criterion, providing examples from the self-contained, resource, and inclusion classes. Three other criteria also were named, i.e., *I-1*, *I-7*, and *I-9*.

I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills. Several teachers discussed this criterion. All agreed that they wanted to use a greater number of higher-level thinking questions but found it challenging. One teacher shared how she helped her students achieve this skill, while also acknowledging that “not everybody gets there.”

Initially, the higher-order thinking questioning part [was more challenging]. But I think sometimes my kids may not grasp the higher thinking, so we use scaffolding and we get them there, we prompt them. And so that helped. Initially, I was intimidated to implement that with my kids, but scaffolding them and then prompting them as much as possible, we can get there. Not everybody gets there. . . . So when I break it down a different way to make them think a different way, it helps them to be in that higher-order thinking level. But it is, it could be a challenge for them at some point, the instructional practice. (2T2)

Another teacher shared a similar experience as she has attempted to include a greater number of higher-order questioning. Although she has seen her students experience some success, she also noted that some students are “not there yet,” despite their best efforts.

We have a big push about higher-order and higher-level questioning. And I was really pleased to spend some time in a workshop looking and talking about higher-level questioning and how I can utilize it in a resource classroom. In the past, I know that I have been graded down for that because I was working with my students on just gleaning the facts and understanding what a topic sentence is and that sort of things, and I absolutely am positive that I was graded down on that sort of higher-order thinking skills because I was a special ed teacher, not because I wasn't trying to pull a prediction out of a kid, you know. . . . Often, I have seventh graders who are reading according to their Stanford scores on a 2.7 grade level, and so we're moving from Bloom's Taxonomy from concrete to

getting them to synthesize, you know. We try. We try really hard, but sometimes we're not there yet. And so somebody comes in on a particular day when I am trying to push higher-order. That's where it really hits me. (1T4)

A third teacher also communicated her commitment to higher-order thinking but acknowledged that the instruction in the special education classroom might look different for the appraiser.

It [higher-order thinking] should be done in a special ed classroom, but it's going to look very different than in a general ed classroom. . . . As long as that's being taken into consideration when being evaluated, when the evaluator comes in and sees, "Okay, well, that's really a higher-order question." As long as they know, "Oh, well, this is special ed so that's going to [look] different." (1T5)

Finally, a fourth teacher discussed higher-order thinking in terms of rigor. While he expressed his belief in the necessity of incorporating rigor into the special education classroom, he also conceded that rigor must be introduced in steps and that the timeframe for students with disabilities may differ from that of students in the general education population. He stated, "They [the administrators] are always stressing rigor. But if we were to take the students that far, they would get frustrated and give up. Right now, it's rigor, rigor, rigor, which is good, but in steps. It takes much longer than regular kids" (2T6).

Administrators, too, shared their thoughts on higher-level thinking. The first administrator communicated her expectation that higher-level questioning would be present in all classrooms to promote thinking. Her comments were followed by those of

two administrators, who describe the dilemma they face in evaluating a special education teacher on the Instructional Practice criteria *I-4*.

I have told all of them I want to see some higher-level questioning in there. You might not get an answer, but I want you to start asking them, “Well, why is this? Or why is it that?” You know, get off the knowledge level, so I hear those now when I go in there. And it doesn’t matter what the answer is, you know; they ask and they’re thinking about it, but so, again, give them the benefit of the doubt that, yes, they did try to go to a higher-level thinking. (1A3)

One administrator described the difficulty in applying the exact wording found in the appraisal documents for Instructional Practice criteria *I-4* to both the general education and the special education classroom, especially with regard to students with severe disabilities.

With life skills and behavior support class, I think there are certain things on the rubric that, I don’t want to say they’re not applicable, but it almost, the wording would almost have to be changed, I think, to make it more user friendly for someone appraising that type of teacher. For example, they talk about a big component is higher-level thinking skills. Well, higher-level thinking skills for a student in a resource class is not the same as higher-level thinking skills in a student in a GT class. I am observing kids in a resource class, and they’re classifying; they had a word and then they had to write the definition of it, and they had to make a picture of it. You know, that, to me, is at the basic knowledge and comprehension level. But, for them, they’re making a

connection perhaps to a word they didn't know before. So that's stretching it for them. (2T2)

Another administrator echoed a similar dilemma in deciding how to provide what she feels to be a fair evaluation of the special education teacher whose students may not have the capability of responding to higher-level questions.

I have [modified the process], and I'm going to tell you. On one of the evaluation question tools, it says, "Does the teacher demonstrate higher-level thinking?" It's very hard, and I hate to say that with special ed, but it is hard when you're in there because some of those kids are low. And you try to get them there, but it's very hard. So you're kind of starting at ground zero with them and trying to move. So every time I get to that one, I go, "Ugh, how can I score this?" You know, you don't want to score it down because it's not their fault that the students aren't [there].

They're trying to get them there, but then at the same time, I can't score them a 4 when I've seen what a 4 looks like, and this is not a 4. So I have modified. I kind of do something in between, you know, and I kind of look at it and, given the lesson or whatever it is that they're discussing, and I make my determination. And so it is subjective. But, yeah, I do [modify] for the special ed teachers because I almost think it's kind of not fair that they're on the same tool as the other teachers or as general ed teachers because the students that they have in some cases, they're trying. They're trying. And I think the students are

trying. It's not that they're not, either. It's just that they're just not quite there.

(2A4)

One administrator summed up the challenges: “So you are trying to kind of make it [the teacher evaluation process] work where it doesn’t work, you know? [That’s] the whole idea of ‘engages students for higher-level thinking’” (1A1).

Three other criteria from the Instructional Practice Rubric also were named as potentially challenging to apply in the evaluation of a special education teacher.

I-1: Facilitates organized, student-centered objective-driven lessons. Several teachers described challenges in planning and delivering lessons that were appropriate for students with disabilities and met the expectations of the Instructional Practice criteria. They described the changes in the lesson components that they feel are necessary to meet their students’ needs. These included changes in pacing, time devoted to independent practice, and teacher prompting. One teacher gave this description of the differences she would expect her appraiser to notice in a typical lesson for her students with severe disabilities:

As far as the typical lesson cycle, I would say that’s probably the one thing that is very different in my [self-contained] classroom. Of course, there is an introduction to the lesson; they get time to do different things. We spend a lot of time working together, so there is not a lot of room to see independent work because I am constantly coaching and prodding and probing them for answers, so that part [of the lesson cycle] would be different. (1T1)

An administrator agreed that the typical lesson plan format may need to be adjusted in terms of group participation and maintaining student attention.

She [the teacher in a class for autistic students] might have some whole-group activity, but it's not a lengthy period of time. Same with life skills; you can't hold their attention very long. (1A3)

Student engagement is an integral part of every lesson. The Instructional Practice Rubric asks appraisers to take note of students' participation in practicing, demonstrating mastery, and connecting new learning. One administrator reflected on the differences in student participation between a general education and special education classrooms.

In a general ed class, you're working with students who are performing on or above level and some slightly below. But when you walk into a special ed class, depending on what the disability is, the children don't always perform as expected, or sometimes they have "on" days and sometimes they have "off" days. And so it is challenging to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness because the student engagement piece plays such a big part. Sometimes I feel like, when we're observing a teacher, you base the effectiveness on the student engagement, the student participation, the communication, and collaboration. And sometimes in a special ed class, depending on the disability, you just sometimes don't see it.

(1A2)

Another administrator gave a similar example regarding lesson participation, again comparing students in the general education classroom with those in the special education classroom.

[In a general education classroom], I see students totally working in groups, and they know exactly what they're supposed to do. Then right after the groups, with a little prompting from the teacher possibly, each group takes a turn, they go up and they explain why and what point of view they're taking and those types of activities. They completely take over the class. It's wonderful to see, but there is no way that can happen downstairs [in a self-contained classroom]. (1A3)

I-7: Promotes high academic expectations for students. One administrator pointed to the challenge teachers and appraisers face in identifying reasonable expectations for students with disabilities. This dilemma makes *I-7* especially difficult for the appraiser on which to rate the teacher.

One of the things with special ed is it's really hard to promote high academic expectations for students. That's hard. This is hard and especially because we all evaluate other people, and so you see this so much easier to do even from a pre-AP to an on-level class, even then to go a step level from an on-level class to a special ed class. It's really hard to say that they do it on that level, and so you find yourself saying, "But for the kids she has, and with the level she has, and how many she has, and the expectation of what these kids are actually going to learn this year, is she doing that?" (1A2)

I-9: Sets and implements discipline management procedures. One teacher described the challenges related to managing student behavior in her special education classroom and concluded that her student behaviors would prevent her from securing a higher rating.

When it comes to classroom management, you know, my kids are going to need frequent redirection no matter how much I try and how much we work on not needing frequent redirection; they will always need frequent redirection. And so, for instance, and I have this one kid and he sits right there, and he drives me nuts. And, I mean, no matter what's going to happen, he is always going to need frequent redirection. But that gives me a 2 on the appraisal system. (2T1)

Determining Teacher Ratings

Two administrators described another situation in which they felt compelled to modify the teacher evaluation process in appraising a special education teacher because they found it difficult to rate a special education teacher following the instructional practices protocol. After completing the classroom observations, appraisers rate the teachers using a scale of 1 to 4 on each of 13 criteria. For a teacher to be rated “highly effective,” i.e., a 4, the appraiser must observe all of the indicators described in a given criteria. The two administrator quotes below describe a situation in which the administrators believed that the special education teacher's role prevented him or her from demonstrating all of the indicators; through no fault of the teacher, the teacher could not qualify as a 3 (effective teacher) or a 4 (highly effective teacher).

When asked, “Have you ever modified the system for special education teachers?” one administrator described a situation in which she felt she needed to deviate from the stated protocol. She also conceded that modifications to standard procedures may affect equity.

No, just mostly the whole idea around what's a 2 [teacher] or a 3 on the evaluation system. That really isn't a fair evaluation of what that class is capable of doing. [Looking at the list of criteria required for a teacher to be rated a 3 or 4] You say, "Okay, you know, this one isn't fair. This one isn't fair, and out of the four [criteria required to be rated a 3 or 4] that are left, she is doing two or she's doing three." So does she have half of all of them that are bulleted there under the 3 for the indicator? Probably not, but is she truly a 3? . . . Yes, she is. So that's one way that I modify it, and I would say that, I would hope the rest of my administrators would [too] because it is conversations that we've had before about the fact that it has to be equitable, and it can't be that this teacher has me as the evaluator, so she is lucky and she got a 3, but this teacher has somebody else who doesn't see it that way, and she gives them a 2. (1A1)

A similar concern was expressed by another administrator:

Where a general ed teacher can earn a 4 very easily, a special ed teacher cannot. Because the 4 category is like, "Okay, you collaborated with the students, the students are aware of their goals, and they're setting their goals, and you're all on the same page." The special ed children will never be there, so it is that part that's very unfair. The special ed teachers in those self-contained classes can get a 3 but, on the instructional piece, they can't get any 4s. (1A3)

Advantages that the Teacher Evaluation System Offers Special Education Teachers

In contrast to those situations in which the Instructional Practices Rubric is difficult to apply to special education teachers, there are situations in which the observation criteria work in their favor. Several examples of indicators for which the special education teachers might easily get credit were named. One teacher provided three examples, the first of which was goal setting.

The only thing that's really good about the special ed teachers here is they all have IEPs for their kids. So that, in itself, that's, like, just very solid evidence of setting a goal, and it's very tightly aligned. Using the data, how they look at student prior performance on tests and that kind of thing to determine what sort of modifications they need to make, that's perfect for that, too. They are supposed to take the lesson plans that they get from the teachers and modify them. So that one is pretty easy. I have a lot of evidence from that piece. (2T2)

The second example was differentiation.

Now, when I sit next to a co-teacher and I hear them working with a student, I can hit differentiation, which is *I-3*. (2T2)

The third examples were taken from the Professional Expectations Rubric.

With special ed teachers, where they're co-teachers, that's something that if they're good at what they do and they're keeping up with their paperwork. You can't collaborate any more with your colleagues in that position . . . communicates with parents. They [the special ed teachers] are the ones that are

calling for the meetings, so it's easy for them to hit that . . . so some things are to their advantage. (2T2)

Summary of Research Question 2

The critical findings for Research Question 2, “How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?” are summarized as follows:

1. Teachers perceive that administrators follow the same teacher evaluation process for general education and special education teachers.
2. Administrators admit that, at times, they face challenges in appraising special education teachers. As a result, administrators modify or adjust the tools or processes of the teacher evaluation system.
3. Evaluating co-teachers is especially difficult, given the expectations of the observation protocols and the typical inclusion setting, resulting in challenges related to scheduling a time to observe a co-teacher's leading a lesson, applying the Instructional Practice Rubric to the co-teacher's lesson, and providing authentic feedback after the lesson.
4. Teachers and administrators gave mixed responses to the question of whether the teacher evaluation system captures the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher.
5. Teachers and administrators agreed that applying the Instructional Practice criteria *I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills* in

- the special education classroom is challenging. This challenge applies to resource classes, self-contained classrooms, and inclusion.
6. Administrators reported the difficulty they experience in applying the criteria of the Instructional Practices Rubric to rate the teacher on a particular criterion. In some situations, administrators believe that the requirements of the system preclude the special education teacher's potential to be rated effective or highly effective.
 7. Special education teachers and administrators also named several situations in which the teacher evaluation system is closely aligned to the important roles of the special education teacher: student goal setting, differentiation, and professional collaboration.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 is, "How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?" The researcher questioned teachers and administrators with regard to their experiences and belief that the evaluation process contributes to the teacher's ongoing professional development, with the intent of gaining insight into the following questions:

1. Do special education teachers and their appraisers believe that the teacher evaluation process leads to improved teaching?
2. Do teachers believe they are growing and developing their professional skills? To what do teachers attribute their professional growth?

3. Do administrators believe that the teachers they appraise are growing and developing their professional skills? To what do administrators attribute the professional growth of their teachers?
4. What aspects of the teacher evaluation process contribute to teacher growth and development?
5. What other experiences contribute to teacher growth?

Professional Growth and Development

Teacher evaluation systems, such as the system used at these two middle schools, were designed with the intent that they would accurately identify effective and ineffective teachers *and* they would support the professional growth and development of the teachers. To determine whether teachers and appraisers believe that the teacher evaluation process is achieving this outcome, the researcher asked the teachers, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?” and asked the appraisers, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?” Figure 6 below presents a summary of their responses.

On a scale of 1–10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?											
Scale 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No Response
Teacher Responses	1*				1		3*	3	2	1	1
On a scale of 1–10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?											
Administrator Responses				1	2	2	1	1	1		

*The researcher marked 2 for a teacher who said “2 or 3,” and a 7 for a teacher who said “7 or 8.”

One teacher declined to give a specific number.

Figure 6. Responses regarding extent to which teacher evaluation process helps teachers to improve.

Impact of Teacher Evaluation System on Professional Growth: Teacher

Perspectives

Most teachers responded positively to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?” Ten of the 12 teachers rated the system a 5 or higher on a Likert scale. Of note is the fact that eight teachers rated the system a 7 or higher, and one teacher even rated the process a 10. There were no discernible differences in the response patterns between the two schools or for teachers of various special ed teacher roles (resource, self-contained, co-teacher). Both beginning and veteran teachers, i.e., with more than 20 years of experience, were among those that rated the process an 8, 9, or 10. All of the first- and second-year teachers rated the system between a 7 and a 10. The teachers who gave the lowest ratings, a 2 and a 5, have been teaching for more than 10 years.

It was interesting to hear the teachers describe their reasons for having rated the system as they did. One teacher with 10 years of experience, who rated the system a 7, elaborated on the opportunity it offers for improvement:

Sometimes I think I can be too self-absorbed, but I feel like, if you really listen and you don’t take it personally, then it could help you become a better educator because sometimes you cannot see yourself. That information that the person [the

appraiser] is trying to help you, if you don't get negative, or you don't take it as, "Oh, they're criticizing me." Because sometimes our inner child comes out, and so if you really look at it as an opportunity to become better, it's really a good tool. (2T4)

Another experienced teacher, who rated the system an 8, expressed that she appreciated the fact that the system spells out clearly what is expected of a teacher at each level, providing the teacher with a road map of what improvements need to be made.

It does help me make improvements as far as, like I said, with the rubric and being able to see exactly what I need to do to get the number [rating] I want, and then also being able to go online and see those examples and see the teachers in the classroom. So I would say it is helpful with helping me to improve and to be a better teacher. (1T1)

A first-year teacher also applauded the clear path that the system provides for improvement: "I would rate it an 8 or a 9 because it matters. You want to do well. I like seeing exactly what I need to work on. It's very honest with her [my appraiser]. My scores will reflect what she saw. I know exactly what I need to improve on" (2T7).

A second-year teacher described his own self-reflection process and how it influenced his desire to improve.

I would think, for myself, it was very helpful; I think it was a 10 for me because I just—and most people wouldn't but you just—don't want to be bad at anything. So when the system tells you that you are not very whatever, then you're like,

okay, there's a road you can take that's frustration and let me go ask a bunch of questions or, wait, let me reflect on this, and maybe I'm not doing enough. (1T2)

Two teachers were less positive about their experiences. In response to the question, "To what extent does the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor help you to improve as a teacher?" One teacher responded that the system has not been helpful for her, except when she had the benefit of an administrator who was well versed in special education.

Honestly, I would say, most of the time it doesn't help me improve as a teacher. It really does help when you, like, I just saw a huge difference when I had somebody that had worked in special education or just knew a lot about it because I got good feedback and it did help me improve. Or, "See these areas, oh, okay, yes, this is an area I need to work on," or just know the things that you're doing well, you know, to keep doing those things, and so that's effective, but otherwise, just, like, "Okay, you look like you're doing a good job," and, I don't know, it doesn't [help]. (1T3)

Another veteran teacher explained why she did not have confidence that the system supports teacher growth.

I don't think it's made to meet our needs, really. I think it is made, the system is made to, well, there is a certain amount of "watchdog-ness" to it. I mean, to the system, which, of course, has been around since I became a teacher, and that's okay because, you know, we need people to come in and out of our rooms. Sometimes, because we're human, to remind us of what we should be doing and

that our classes need to go all the way up to the bell as close as possible and that rigor needs to be there, so those things are good. That part is good, but as far as really being a help to me, I don't think really that its [the teacher evaluation system's] purpose is to be particularly helpful to us as teachers. (1T4)

Impact of Teacher Evaluation System on Professional Growth: Administrator Perspectives

Having presented the teacher responses regarding the impact of the teacher evaluation system on their professional growth, the researcher will now offer the administrator responses. Figure 7 replicates the information provided in Figure 6 for the reader's convenience in analyzing administrator responses and making comparisons between teachers and administrators.

On a scale of 1–10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?												
Scale 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No Response	
Teacher Responses		1*			1		3*	3	2	1	1	
On a scale of 1–10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?												
Administrator Responses				1	2	2	1	1	1			
*The researcher marked 2 for a teacher who said “2 or 3,” and a 7 for a teacher who said “7 or 8.”												
One teacher declined to give a specific number.												

Figure 7. Responses regarding extent to which teacher evaluation process helps teachers to improve.

Most administrators responded positively to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?” Their responses ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 9, with the scores clustering near 5 and 6. Even though their responses were not as positive as were the teachers’, only one appraiser rated the system below the mid-point. There were no discernible differences in the response patterns between the two schools. One pattern, however, emerged with regard to years of experience. The two administrators who rated the process the highest, with an 8 and a 9, were both in their first year as assistant principals. The three most experienced administrators, who all have nine or more years of experience, gave the lowest ratings, a 4 and two 5s.

The administrators explained their perspective, providing details to support their opinion. One administrator who rated the system positively spoke of the value of ongoing coaching and feedback: “You know, if you give them enough feedback on the form and then you sit down and have a conference, then it does help them improve. I

mean, it's just right there in black and white" (1A4). Another administrator, who was less confident that the teacher evaluation system supports professional growth, shared her frustration with the tools in the formal process that she believes often slow her down.

I think I would have to say, like, a 5. I feel like I can give feedback with our school evaluation form. With my own system, I could do it really, really quick and give feedback, right? Organizing it, inputting it, and the thought process takes me a much longer time. I like to give detailed feedback. I like to be sure that they know where to go, and what they could do better, what they could do. And I know my team, they give a lot of feedback. So the inefficiencies of the system [making reference to the online technology tool appraisers use to enter teacher data] keep it from being as effective as it could be. (2A3)

Professional development is predicated on the underlying assumption that teachers have a desire to improve so that they can develop their professional skills and better serve the needs of their students. A less idealistic view was shared by one administrator, who described a different source of motivation for the teacher to improve, i.e., the value-added scores. In this district, value-added scores are one of the factors of the student achievement component of the teacher evaluation system for some teachers. In addition, the value-added scores are used to calculate teacher bonuses. Most of the special education teachers do not have value-added scores calculated in their evaluation ratings, but most are eligible for bonuses based on value-added scores.

Some of the comments and feedback that you give them [the teachers] are very helpful, and they'll go, "I never thought of that." But then, also, I think in their

minds, they think, “Okay, well, if this is not going to get me terminated, so to speak,” all they care about is the value-added scores. And I hate to say it, but that’s what the teachers—when we talk, they always say, “What can I do to bring my scores up? What do you think I need to do? How can I get this up? What are they looking at?” . . . They care about the feedback, but, to be honest with you, the most part they care about is their value-added scores and how they can get those up. (1A4)

Factors that Contribute to Teacher Growth and Development

Through the course of the interviews, teachers consistently expressed their desire to grow as professionals and to improve their teaching skills. Teachers at all stages of their careers expressed this intent. In addition, administrators conveyed their belief that it is their responsibility to support teachers in their growth. The researcher asked participants to describe the elements of the teacher appraisal process that they believe contribute to teacher growth and development. In addition, the researcher asked what other experiences contribute to their growth. The elements of the teacher evaluation system that participants most often named included the individualized teacher plan for professional development and appraiser feedback of classroom observations.

Teachers’ Commitment to Professional Growth

Teachers expressed their desire and intent to grow as professionals. One teacher, who was in his second year, described his desire for continuous improvement: “So now we just got to focus on trying to get better and better and better continually. And then, that’s how I ended up in grad school. . . . I think it just let me know that I needed to

continue to grow, that there is no plateau or standstill” (1T2). Another teacher described how her appraiser encouraged professional growth: “My gosh, I have to grow. I don’t have a choice. My supervisor would not allow me to stay stagnant, so I love that challenge. I love it.” Then, she gave specific examples in response to the question, “In what ways have you improved?”

Flexibility. Just the fact that I am flexible. Now more than ever. More flexibility. Honestly, just dying of my old self and putting my kids first. I have taken on the challenge of tutoring three different grade levels, two different content areas. And I want to implement another content area, but I am like, wow, I am really pushing myself. . . . I have grown a lot in that sense. (2T2)

Finally, one of the teachers summed up the value of professional growth quite simply: “I am, by nature, just kind of a curious person and I am always trying to find new things” (1T1). Of the 12 teacher participants, four are enrolled in Master’s programs and three already have a Master’s degree, another indication of their commitment to continuous learning.

Administrator’s Responsibility in Supporting Professional Growth

Administrators voiced their commitment to supporting teachers in their growth, demonstrating the conviction that it is their responsibility to help teachers to develop. One administrator described the goal-setting, classroom observations, and feedback conferences, which are part of the teacher evaluation process, and how these tools allow for individualization and ongoing teacher-appraiser dialog.

So whatever goals we set out for ourselves at the beginning of the year, at mid-year after we have actually done a formal observation, we come back and visit with our teachers, and it gives us an opportunity to revisit those goals and just check in and see, like, how are we doing? Were these the goals the right goals for us? How are we in reaching those goals or, and in some cases, we may have already met that goal. So because it's a working document, we can come in and we can change the goals or tailor them to fit, like, the classroom needs and what our students need. (1A2)

The administrator continued, providing more details to describe the goal-setting process and its advantages.

The thing I really, really like about this system that we're using now is that it allows us to actually set some goals for ourselves, which, with the other appraisal system that we used before, there really wasn't a goal-setting piece in there, and I think that for both of the teacher and the administrator, it gives us an opportunity to really look at where are our teachers are in their practice and where they can look ahead to grow. And then, for those who are not doing very well, it gives us an opportunity to grow them and give them a chance to become effective. The other piece that I like about this is that, even if the teacher is not a highly effective teacher and a teacher that needs more support, I feel like this particular tool that we're using now gives us as administrators an opportunity to really support, and it really holds us accountable to creating a plan to support the teachers. (1A2)

The value of this process is further validated by a second administrator from a different school, who described the process and her responsibilities in a similar fashion.

At the beginning of the year, we do what's called an IPDP, which is your individual professional development plan. It's whatever the teacher feels that they want to work on personally based on the rubric. So if this teacher says, "You know what? I am great at teaching content and knowing it, but I am not so good at doing engaging activities." So at the beginning of the year, they pick two to three and say these are the things that I want to develop. These are the things that I want to work on. (2A1)

Administrators also expressed their viewpoint of the teacher development process in terms of their responsibility to support teacher growth.

It's my job to support them. So if they say, "I want to work on student engagement and I know Ms. J is great at that," then I would support them in getting them a time off or a class period off so they can go see the teacher. (2A1)

Another administrator gave a similar perspective:

[It is the] responsibility of the administrator to keep up with it because if I say that I expect this teacher to work on this particular goal, well, I need to be monitoring it, too, you know, like, if I am saying, I need you to co-teach. I need you to go observe this teacher. Me, not necessarily micro-managing, but setting things in place where, you know, "Did this teacher come and observe you?" Did this teacher have the opportunity or not even that, but did I make it accessible for the teacher to be able to come and observe this particular person? (2A4)

Individual Professional Development Plan

The Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) is developed collaboratively with the teacher and the appraiser. Together, they identify professional learning goals for the teacher and develop a plan for achieving the goals, which includes specific outcomes and sources of support. The IPDP is a working document that can be amended as needed. The teacher and the appraiser refer back to this document during their discussions at the mid-year progress conference and the summative end-of-year conference.

The majority of the teachers reported that they found the goal-setting process to be meaningful. They named the specific areas of growth that they had identified for themselves, such as classroom management, parent communication, developing skills to implement new technology programs, differentiation, higher-level questioning, and lesson planning, to name a few. Participants consistently described a process in which they developed the goals mutually with their administrator and returned to the goals throughout the year. The process appears to be strengthened by the fact that the teacher and appraiser meet for a series of three conferences during the year, with a commitment to discuss the teacher's goals each time. Often, teacher observation and feedback conferences include a discussion of the teacher's progress in achieving professional growth goals. As one teacher commented, "It gives me guidance. My administrator gives me feedback and helps me keep on track. . . It gives us a blueprint, something to work towards" (2T5).

One teacher gave an account of the process, beginning with the identification of areas for growth.

We come together, my evaluator, and we look at the criteria that we are being measured or being evaluated on, and we select those which we feel we want to improve in or where we need areas in growth. We select those areas, and those are the areas that he [the appraiser] will come in or she will come in and evaluate us on. (2T2)

She continued to describe the goal-setting process and its value.

I think it is meaningful because it will hold me, myself, accountable. If I set myself this as the goal that we're going to work on, yes, it holds me accountable because then I have to prove, "How did you meet this goal?" And, like I said, these administrators, they're very, very, they're fair, but they're very, they hold us accountable. And for our benefit and, most importantly, for our children, so I think it is beneficial for us to set that goal and hold ourselves accountable. (2T2)

One teacher shared these details of the goal-setting process, describing her specific area for growth and the results she has experienced.

[At the goal-setting conference] we talked about that. My big area is classroom management. So we focused a lot on talking with other teachers and sitting in other teacher's classrooms and trainings and stuff to read. Actually, my behavior management has improved a lot since the beginning of the year. (2T1)

When one veteran teacher was asked what rating she would give the process, she began by rating the evaluation process relatively low, as a 5, but then went on to describe how the experience actually provides checkpoints for her that may be beneficial.

Honestly, I would just say mid-line. I am going to give it a 5. I think that, yes, it's helpful in a sense that we do need to know areas that we need to improve, okay, but I guess maybe because I have been teaching for a while, and I try to be professional when I am doing my work, and I try to make improvements as far as instruction, and I am not going to say I don't know the areas I need to improve. I know what I need to do. It's a matter of, you know, how am I going to get that done, and I guess if those things are built in, those checkpoints for me, then I probably will be doing a little bit better. (2T3)

Like teachers, appraisers described the benefits of the IPDP. One administrator gave the following description:

So whatever goals we set for ourselves at the beginning of the year, at mid-year, after we have actually done a formal observation, we come back and visit with our teachers, and it gives us an opportunity to revisit those goals and just check in and see, "How are we doing? Are these goals the right goals for us? How are we reaching those goals?" Or in some cases, we may have already met the goal. So because it's a working document, we can come in and we can change the goals or tailor them to fit the classroom needs. (1A2)

Another administrator considered the IPDP in the larger context of developing an ongoing dialog with the teacher throughout the year for the purpose of supporting teacher

growth. In answer to the question, “What causes teachers to become better?” she responded:

With any teacher, not just special ed, I think being very reflective of your practice. Really looking at every individual child. Using your classroom data to understand where your students are. And I think any teacher that looks at their class, looks at their students, looks at the data and really uses that information to drive their instruction and again the reflection piece, to come back and say, “Okay this isn’t working. I need to make some changes.” And just being flexible, I think that is what increases the teacher effectiveness. And being open to feedback as well, not being afraid of saying, “I need assistance. I need support. I am not understanding this.” Just wanting to have that collaborative relationship with whoever is their supervisor is important. (1A2)

Two administrators, however, wondered whether the goal-setting process is equally valuable for all teachers. Is it more beneficial to novice or struggling teachers? One administrator used the word “hobby” as a way to communicate what he perceives to be the non-essential nature of the process as it relates to effective and highly effective teachers.

I think with effective and highly effective teachers, it is more like a hobby. Setting that goal may even be a waste of time for those highly effective teachers, but I do agree and believe that it is very useful for those teachers who are ineffective or developing. For the developing teachers, I think it gives them a goal, a challenge, something to aim and strive for, and I have seen teachers here at

school who were developing and who had their goals and who we can honestly say, wow, you know setting those things in place, it really put some fire or pushed or challenged this individual. I wonder, if we hadn't done that, would we have had the same result? And so, for those teachers, I believe it is definitely useful. (2A4)

A second administrator expressed a similar point of view.

What [would be] more helpful for me, for example, if I had the time to concentrate on a teacher that is struggling or a new teacher, for example, that has lots of potential. You can see it, yet they're not horrible but they need that coaching. And so, to me, sinking an hour of my time into writing up an appraisal for somebody who is a master teacher, who is a master teacher proven by years of evaluations and value-added data, I am sinking hours into that teacher, and it's taking away from helping another teacher. (2A2)

Feedback and Coaching

The teacher appraisal system requires that each evaluator complete a minimum of two 30-minute observations and two 10-minute observations. In addition to these required observations, it is common practice on both campuses for administrators to make regular informal classroom observations. Both teachers and administrator participants referred to the frequency of both formal and informal observations and the feedback conversations that follow.

Principals at Frank Luke and Maple Leaf Middle School described regular practices in which they meet with the administrative team to discuss classroom

observations and walk-throughs. The administrative team meetings focus on sharing observations, clarifying questions, offering support or suggestions to one another, and norming the appraisal instrument—in short, ensuring that the administrative teams keep a sharp eye on supporting teachers to ensure quality instruction.

Teachers' responses indicated that they value the feedback they receive. They described the frequency of observations, the quick turnaround on feedback, the opportunities for face-to-face dialog, and the ways in which the feedback is related to their areas for growth. Many compelling examples follow. One co-teacher gave this account of informal observations and quick follow-up from her administrator:

Yes, they'll do pop-ins. It could be either [formal or informal]; we don't even know if they're observing us or they're observing the children or the general ed teacher. But, yes. They're definitely present. They show up and on those, they'll give us feedback, you know, those will be a little bit informal. "Hey, you did a good job on this. You know, I saw that you implemented this." (2T2)

A teacher who rated the system a 10 described the frequency of the feedback he receives and the accessibility of his appraiser.

You get tons of feedback; my AP [assistant principal], I'm always talking to her, so I can pop in her office whenever and ask her how things are going and what she thinks needs to be worked on, I could have done better, or be done better. She's always really responsive in that way. . . . I think informal conversations with Ms. L probably happen, probably, honestly, two, maybe three times a week with her because I talk to her off and on so much. (1T2)

One teacher, who rated the system a 7 stated, “It is helpful, the feedback.” She provided this example of the value of having an administrator who is visible and provides immediate feedback:

She comes a lot for the formal, but she is the seventh grade assistant principal, and she is out here anyways. So she will pop her head in, and then I’ll ask her, I am like, “How can I improve on this?” And so she just will give me feedback on that one. (2T1)

Another teacher described his experiences in receiving weekly feedback from his appraiser and the special education department chair: “There are several observations by the appraisers and the department chair. At least once a week, I receive feedback. The department chair will provide feedback from her iPad, and we sign off right then. The appraiser sends it online” (2T6).

One teacher described how her appraiser helps her work toward professional goals by giving feedback and suggestions: “My administrator might say, ‘Maybe you can incorporate this.’ Then, when he comes into my classroom, I can try it out and build on the feedback. The feedback is very helpful” (2T2). Another teacher also described the benefit of individualized feedback and the opportunity for the teacher to quickly make positive changes.

Having my supervisor come in and being able to discuss it face to face afterwards I think is definitely helpful because I work much better with that face-to-face feedback, so I would say it’s helpful because I get information back on things that

I could change. It's usually pretty concrete things, which are things I can just implement the next day, which is nice. (1T5)

From the administrator's perspective, the value of feedback is also confirmed. One administrator described the approach she takes to support a beginning teacher, providing feedback in small bites.

I would say authentic feedback [causes teachers to become better]. Ms. Montgomery, especially, she is a new teacher. So she is open to that feedback. And I can say that the things when I do come in her classroom afterwards, we have our meeting with each other. When I met with her, I have seen her put the few things in place and I also feel that it's necessary to support them as well. . . . And so it's just the support and giving them feedback and giving them instructional practices. I feel like not overwhelming them, giving a strategy or two at a time as opposed to a whole book of things. (2A1)

Another administrator answered the question, "What causes teachers to become better?"

Feedback. A lot of feedback, a lot of opportunities to visit teachers who have had success with it. I think just a lot of coaching and giving them an opportunity to improve. If we don't give them feedback, don't give them opportunities to see what good teaching looks like, then we can't have them improve because we're not doing anything to assist them with that. So definitely good coaching and lots of opportunities for them to grow professionally by attending staff development or visiting other teachers. (1A4)

When the researcher asked one of the principals, “Is there an aspect of the teacher evaluation process that you can point to and say that it helps teachers grow?” the principal advocated the value of feedback that is delivered in small segments.

I would say the 10-minute one [10-minute observation, as opposed to the 30-minute observation]. I like the 10-minute observation. I found that the most powerful one because it gives them a snapshot. It gives me a lot of opportunity versus that 30-minute one. Go in, see a little bit, and talk to you. Go in, see a little bit, and talk to you. Go in, see a little bit, talk to you. OK, I see . . . talk to me about that.” And I can do a little bit more coaching when I can do the 10-minute observation and then it gives me more time.

I can look at one or two areas. I can type it up real quickly. I can give the feedback. Then they will ask, “Hey, can I attend this workshop?” and I’m like, “Yeah, not only that but you can observe in another teachers’ classroom.” . . . Those five-minute conversations. They don’t need to be an hour long, exhaustive. And then, that’s the culture now instead of pointing out everything they did wrong. That’s what I do best, and it is best for our teachers. I can tell them, “Oh, sure, I can come in next time and check.” It no longer becomes you telling them what they need; they are telling you what they need. That’s when you really know you are growing your teachers. (2A3)

Support and Coaching from an Administrator with Expertise in Special Education

At Maple Leaf Middle School, one of the appraisers is a former special education teacher and special education chair. Both schools also have a special education

chairperson who provides guidance to special education teachers but does not evaluate them. The special education chairperson at Frank Luke also makes classroom observations and coaches teachers. The teachers conveyed their appreciation for having access to an educator with specialized knowledge in their field. One co-teacher stated, “We have our special ed chair, department chair. She’ll come in and she’ll give us some observations and . . . they definitely help.” She went on to provide examples of the expertise the department chair is able to provide.

[It is] definitely [helpful], because she is more understanding, like, “Okay, I understand that you might not be able to do what the administrator wants to see in their evaluation. They might not be able to see it because they don’t understand the type of students that we deal with, but try this.” So her feedback is more the back-door part, you know, “Come here, let me show you this way. Maybe this is how you can meet this particular criteria in your evaluation.” So she definitely gives us insight on that. (2T2)

A co-teacher on the other campus shared a similar viewpoint and spoke specifically about how helpful the feedback was when she was coached by an administrator with knowledge of special education.

It was really nice last year; we had Ms. W [as an evaluator], and you know she was special ed chair and knows everything about special ed, and she understands completely the co-teach, so she knows what she is looking for to evaluate a co-teacher, and that was nice. I got excellent feedback from her, you know, like,

really constructive feedback. And I found it really more helpful than any other year when I had been evaluated. (1T3)

A self-contained teacher also expressed her gratitude for the expertise of her appraiser, who is a former special education teacher and special education department chair, because she understands the subtle changes in lesson delivery that are necessary for students with severe disabilities.

She understands the spectrum of my classroom, and it's not going to look like a typical lesson cycle. So she gets that, and so she is looking for, are the students learning? Are they comfortable? Are they happy? Is there some progress going on? And so that's what she is looking for versus maybe another observer or evaluator that really doesn't understand the dynamics of a life skills room.

Someone who just understands the dynamics of the students and the classroom.

We may have a student that is having a meltdown at the time and she understands that that's just his typical behavior and doesn't count that against me, versus someone who may not quite understand those typical behaviors that you see. So that helps a lot. (1T1)

The researcher wished to uncover a bit of expertise from an administrator with special education experience by asking, "How do you know when teachers are improving?" She described what she looks for as she coaches teachers and the feedback she gives them to improve.

Well, let me [describe] co-teachers. They're just managing their classrooms.

There is no time wasted in the classroom. There is a lot of planning. They

understand their curriculum. Their management is good. I had a brand new co-teacher a couple of years ago, and he was scared to death when he first went in the classroom, and that was fine. He was a brand-new teacher, and I just kept coaching him and coaching him, and, “This is what I need to see you do when I walk in. I don’t want to see you stand in the back of the room with your arms folded. That’s not what I want to see.” You know. “I want to see you working with students. I want to see you interacting with the groups. I want you bringing me data. I want you to tell me how they did on Stanford. How are they doing on their state assessment? What are their weaknesses? How are you working on that?” You know, I just keep talking at them. (1A4)

Clearly, the coaching and guidance from an administrator with experience in special education is highly valued by the special education teachers. At both middle schools, the special education chairperson is designated as a coach to the teachers, rather than as an evaluator. The special education chairs expressed the opinion that this distinction has allowed for a positive, supportive relationship to develop. There is also an assistant principal on one campus who has extensive special education experience and has been an appraiser for two years. Both the novice and experienced teachers spoke highly of their professional relationship with the assistant principal and described how their teaching had improved as a result of her coaching and feedback.

The researcher wished to learn how the expertise of the special education chairperson was shared with other administrators who have responsibility for coaching and evaluating special education teachers but have less experience and expertise in

special education. Of the eight administrators responsible for evaluating special education teachers, one administrator has experience as a special education teacher and special education chair. She also is certified in special education. Of the remaining seven administrators, only one had attended training specifically for special education, none had experience as a special education teacher, none was certified in special education, and none had taken a college course in special education. One assistant principal explained that, in her seven years as an administrator, the current year was the first year in which she was evaluating a special education teacher. When asked about training, she responded, “I am sad to say I have never attended any special education training.”

Therefore, the researcher probed further, asking the special education chairpersons what opportunities they had to share their expertise with other administrators and inquiring whether the other administrators ever sought their guidance. Neither chairperson indicated that such exchanges took place.

Changing Curriculum Expectations

Developing expertise in a new content or course is one way in which teachers grow professionally. In several different situations, a change in curriculum, the addition of a new program or a change in teaching assignments (content or grade level) resulted in a need for the teacher to learn a new system, new information, or new skills. For example, the self-contained teachers implemented a new district curriculum, two resource teachers were responsible for implementing a technology-based learning program, and

more than half of the co-teachers were assigned to subject areas or grade levels that they had not previously taught.

The teachers shared their experiences in learning and growing as professionals. The first example is from a teacher assigned to a self-contained special education classroom, who described the changes she made in implementing a new district curriculum.

As far as growing within this district, within the state, they're always changing. They're always changing. The plans that we have to make for our students, the requirements that they have for graduation. Even what the goals look like, I mean that's new. They didn't look like that in the past. We had a FACES curriculum that we followed. And objectives and goals look totally different, and now it's more on the side of the state assessments, and so I think, yes, I do continue to grow because you have to be able to develop goals for your students to meet. (2T3).

Another self-contained teacher at a different school site also described the impact of this new curriculum on her professional learning.

I am always looking for areas where I can grow and where I can do better. And with the new curriculum that they have, it's almost like, when they bring in a new curriculum, it's like you're a teacher for the first time. And there is so much information, and I really like it and it works well, so I am looking forward to kind of getting into that a little bit more. Because they have an academic piece, and then they have this core piece that focuses on duties and responsibilities and

vocations, and they have kind of tied everything into the state assessment, actually because they have different levels. So it's just a lot of information. (1T1)

She summarized with this statement about professional growth: "Just having a new curriculum kind of allows me to be a better teacher because I am always trying to find ways to improve, to make things better, and make them more exciting for my students."

A resource teacher described his growth as a result of requirements to implement a technology-based program for his students.

I think [I am improving as a teacher], especially with technology. Twenty years ago, we never had iPads. Now it's the most important. We have to stay on top of that. . . . This year, in the fall, I attended three trainings with Odyssey, which is an online computer program for resource math. I had to learn how to use it. I know I'm improving because at the beginning of the year I had trouble. You have to assign lessons to the students. Each week you send a report. You monitor their progress through reports. Now I am becoming more comfortable. (2T6)

The first years of a teacher's career can be especially challenging in terms of content knowledge. When asked, "Are you improving?" one second-year co-teacher described how he has grown professionally in the area of curriculum.

I feel like I have, and I think it was just from first year to second year because I know so much more of the curriculum than I knew last year, and I didn't get in 'til about September last year. So I was kind of in the room, literally, kind of lost for a while. I knew I was supposed to help my students, so I helped them the best I

could. But as far as the content, I wasn't 100% on everything. And now, I'm probably like 90% on most of it, some of it 100. It helps a lot. (1T2)

When co-teachers are assigned to teach a subject or a grade level that they have not previously taught, the content or instructional strategies unique to that subject and grade level may present a learning challenge for the co-teacher. Several co-teachers referred to the difficulties of being proficient in multiple subject areas. One co-teacher explained how she has expanded her knowledge in various content areas.

Before, it was only math and science. So now we have social studies, we have reading, we have English and sixth, seventh, and eighth, so I think that makes me a better teacher. I get to learn again. I go back; it was like I am going back to school. So learning all of these new contents, so it helps me feel comfortable now to help my kids. . . . But now I push myself. I push myself to learn all of these areas and teach my kids. (2T2)

Common Vision for Effective Teaching

Another way in which teachers improve their practice is by developing skills in the implementation of effective teaching strategies. So, we must ask, "How do teachers identify and select effective strategies? How do they know whether they are being implemented appropriately?" Both teachers and administrators referred to the Instructional Practice Rubric and related online information as tools that have provided them with examples of effective teaching strategies and clear descriptions of how they can be put into practice. One administrator referred to the value of Instructional Practice Rubric: "The good part is they break it down for you [in the Instructional Practice

Rubric] . . . and so they're giving you bullet points. They're giving you examples of what it looks like" (2A1).

One teacher expressed her appreciation for the clarity and simplicity of the Instructional Practice Rubric.

With looking at the rubric that they give you, you know, 1, 2, 3, or 4, I mean it's pretty self-explanatory what you need to have in order to get that number, which is actually better. That's one of the things that I appreciate. It's kind of like a kid who gets a rubric and they know what they need to get an A, a B, a C or a D.

(1T1)

She also described the benefit of watching the online videos that the district produced to illustrate criteria in the Instructional Practice Rubric: "I am a visual person, so that helps me. Of course, I have the rubric and I am like, okay, I need to make sure I do this, this, this, and this, but then actually seeing it in action is like, oh, okay, that's what they want it to look like" (1T1).

Another administrator referred to the Instructional Practice Rubric, supporting online videos, and classroom descriptions found on the district website as good examples of effective instructional practices. He pointed out that, although the exemplars may seem unrealistic to some teachers, others take advantage of the examples provided by the district and use the resources to improve their skills. For example, one of the level 4 descriptors for lesson planning, taken from the Instructional Practice Rubric, refers to the teacher and students' creating a lesson plan together.

So I know some teachers, without meaning any harm, they say, “Oh, really, like, if I am going to have my students sit in there with me, actually developing a lesson plan. Like, if this kid is really going to be interested in it.” So yes, it may seem unrealistic, but it gives us the challenge and like, why not? Could it be possible? And I know some teachers who actually do it, you know, they may not sit right at the computer typing up a lesson plan, but as they are teaching the lesson and they see what kids are interested in, the teacher obviously doesn’t throw away the content of the curriculum or whatever it is that is needed at that moment just because the kid wants something, but they found ways of being able to incorporate it, and so some teachers, they do surveys with kids. Some teachers ask them right away, “What’s new? What are you guys trying out? What are you guys doing this week?” The simple stuff, but they found ways of incorporating that into their teaching. (2A4)

Interaction With or Observation of Other Teachers

What other experiences help teachers to grow? Teachers named the individualized development plan and ongoing conversations with their appraisers, but they also shared other insights in terms of the ways they learn from other teachers. One co-teacher commented on what he learns from watching the general education teacher.

In co-teach, I learn from different teachers. You see how the students learn from other teachers, and you think, That’s something I’d use. I’m exposed to different classes and different teachers. It helps me see different ways to include those ideas. (2T6)

Another teacher commented on the value of connecting with other teachers.

I have always talked to a lot of teachers. “What do you think about this? How should I do this?” I always thought that was really important. And they [the administrators] give us a lot of things to read, but I don’t ever really find those super helpful because I learn a lot more by discussing with people and seeing how they do things and bouncing off of them. (2T1)

Summary of Research Question 3

The critical findings for Research Question 3, “How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?” are summarized below.

1. The majority of the teachers responded very positively to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?” Their responses were consistent for all special education roles, i.e., self-contained, resource, and co-teach. Both novice and experienced teachers rated the process high. The two lowest ratings were given by experienced teachers (10+ years).
2. The administrators’ responses to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?” were also positive, although not as positive as were the teacher responses. Novice administrators rated the system higher, and experienced administrators rated it lower.

3. Teachers consistently expressed their commitment and desire to improve their instructional practices.
4. Administrators conveyed their sense of responsibility to support teachers in their professional growth.
5. Most teachers reported that the IPDP is a helpful and meaningful tool to support professional growth. Some participants, however, also expressed the opinion that the IPDP is more beneficial for new and struggling teachers, and less so for experienced or master teachers.
6. Both teachers and administrators believe that feedback and coaching support professional growth and the improvement of instructional practices. Teachers especially expressed their appreciation for coaching they receive from an administrator with expertise in special education.
7. At times, changes in curriculum expectations result in professional growth for teachers.
8. Participants named the Instructional Practice Rubric and related online resources as a means of professional growth as they have provided a clear description of effective teaching practices.
9. Teachers identified interaction with other teachers as a means to improve practice.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the findings, beginning with a description of the research context regarding the development and implementation of the teacher evaluation system at the district level and at the two school sites. Participant responses

were analyzed and presented in four parts: (a) roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, (b) Research Question 1; (c) Research Question 2; and (d) Research Question 3.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will provide an overview of the research. It begins with a restatement of the problem, followed by a summary of the major findings, the conclusions, and implications for practice. The chapter closes with recommendations for future research.

Restatement of the Problem

In 2012, the U.S. DOE reported that approximately 6.5 million students with disabilities received educational services (NCES, 2012). The academic success for these students depends on quality instruction delivered by a highly effective teacher—that is very often a highly effective *special education teacher*. Feng and Sass (2010) stated, “The logical starting point for any policy to address the achievement of students with disabilities is the quality of teachers instructing special education students” (p. 2). Confirming the importance of special education teachers and the value of an effective teacher evaluation system, the CEC (2012b) recommended that evaluation models for special education teachers accurately reflect the diverse roles of the special education teacher, measure the effective implementation of evidence-based practices, and include reliable indicators of the special education teacher’s impact on academic growth. The difficulty, however, has been that, “Precious little is known about the effect of teacher quality on the ability of teachers to promote achievement and enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities” (Feng & Sass, p. 2).

Teacher quality is being redefined in terms of value-added research (Chetty et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2008; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), recommendations for new teacher evaluation policies (Bill & Melinda Gates, 2010; Burdette, 2011b; Carey, 2004; CEC, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Glazerman et al., 2010; Goe, 2007; Little, 2009; NCTQ, 2011, 2012; Weisberg et al., 2009), and incentives for the implementation of reform models (U.S. DOE, 2009, 2010). The words *special education*, however, are rarely found in these reports (Brownell et al., 2012). Efforts to study teacher quality and to reform teacher evaluation systems have typically been guided by the roles and responsibilities of general education teachers, often ignoring the differences in the roles and responsibilities, as well as the skills and expertise required of special education teachers (Brownell et al., 2012; Holdheide et al., 2010).

The differences, however, between general education and special education teachers are evident in several important ways. First, the unique and specialized competencies required of special educators are delineated in the preparation and credentialing process, as described by The Advanced Preparation Standards (CEC, 2012a). Additionally, time studies have demonstrated the wide range of tasks for which special education teachers are responsible (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Practitioners have also confirmed the differences unique to special education teachers. In their survey of 1,100 state and district special education administrators, Holdheide et al. (2010) reported that the majority of respondents agreed that the knowledge, skills, and expertise of special education teachers is distinct from that of general education teachers. These differences are heightened by the great variability in the roles assumed by special

education teachers, the heterogeneous population of students they serve, and the expectation that each student's instructional plan is highly individualized (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014a).

Collectively, these issues point to the challenge of identifying a single evaluation system appropriate to the wide array of teaching environments and student populations served through special education. Researchers question whether measures of teacher quality that are used to evaluate general education teachers can be used effectively to evaluate special education teachers, including the use of teacher observation protocols (Frudden & Manatt, 1986; Holdheide et al., 2010; Katims & Henderson, 1990; Moya & Gay, 1982), value-added measures (Ahearn, 2009; Brownell et al., 2012; Burdette, 2011a, 2011b; Buzick & Laitusis, 2010; Feng & Sass, 2010; Holdheide et al., 2010, 2012), and teacher certification (Carlson, Lee, & Schroll Westat, 2004; Feng & Sass, 2010; Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004). Holdheide et al. (2010) summarized the dilemma: "Few systems have the capacity to differentiate among specialty area educators, address the challenges in accurately measuring achievement growth for their students, and connect that growth to teacher effects" (p. 1).

Until now, research in the field of teacher quality, as it relates to special education, has often focused on pre-service preparation, certification, and content knowledge, with less attention focused on what happens to teachers after they enter the profession (Boe et al., 2007; Brownell et al., 2009; Nougaret et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2004). In some cases, researchers were able to assess the efficacy of special education *programs*, yet "none of them investigates the role that *teachers* play in promoting the

achievement of students with disabilities (Feng & Sass, 2010, p. 7). Research reports and policy recommendations for the reform of teacher evaluation systems have focused almost exclusively on general education teachers, leading the CEC (2012b) to state, “There is no consensus and almost no research about how these teachers [special education teachers] might be evaluated” (p. 2). Similarly, Brownell et al. (2012) described the challenges: “Unfortunately, there is little to guide states and districts as they consider evaluating special educators . . . as a field, we have limited research identifying the dimensions of teacher quality in special education” (p. 272).

Regrettably, current reform models for teacher evaluation have not been validated with special education teachers and they have not been designed to adequately take into account the unique nature of the special education setting. Even two years after the CEC published its recommendations, there remains little agreement among states in how they might best address the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers. Further, the empirical research base is non-existent (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014b).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Policymakers and advocates of special education point to a need to consider how reform models of teacher evaluation can fairly and accurately assess special education teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators on two middle school campuses located in a district that has implemented a reformed teacher evaluation system. The researcher examined participants’ views of how the teacher evaluation system identifies effective special education teachers, the ways in which

administrators and teachers approach the challenges of applying the teacher evaluation system to the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, and how the teacher evaluation process supports the professional growth and development of special education teachers.

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teacher evaluation systems identify effective special education teachers?
2. How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?
3. How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

Methodology Overview

For this qualitative study, the researcher used a case study design to investigate the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in the use of teacher evaluation systems. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed the participants to describe their everyday experiences as they occur naturally in the workplace and to reveal their realities and beliefs (Mertens, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Teacher evaluation systems tend to focus on process and are, by nature, complex; therefore, the topic is well suited to a qualitative study.

In addition, a case study approach allowed the researcher to focus on specific content, collect data in a naturally occurring environment, and make use of multiple sources of data within a bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Willis, 2007). In this investigation, the bounded system consisted of the special education teachers and

administrators on two campuses who have demonstrated academic success for students with disabilities in a school district that has implemented teacher evaluation reform. Participants in this study were selected through purposeful, convenience sampling. Data was collected through interviews, a review of documents, and observations conducted by the researcher. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Summary of Major Findings and Conclusions

The findings are presented in four parts. These sections are as follows: (a) roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers; (b) Research Question 1; (c) Research Question 2; and (d) Research Question 3.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teachers

Teachers described their responsibilities, including both those within the classroom and those outside the classroom. These tasks include planning and delivering instruction, collaboration with other professionals, planning and leading ARDs, parent communication, meeting the social and emotional needs of students, and student assessment and progress monitoring.

Planning and delivering instruction. Special education teacher participants described a wide variety of roles that they assume during the day, often following complex schedules. Teachers are assigned as self-contained teachers, resource teachers, co-teachers, and study lab teachers. Eight of the 12 teacher participants have multiple roles, with the most challenging schedules typically assigned to co-teachers. Co-teachers are often assigned as teachers in the resource classroom or study lab in addition to their

assignments in the inclusion classrooms. On one of the campuses, co-teachers may be assigned to as many as six or eight classrooms of varying subjects and grade levels.

At the other campus, teachers have as many as three assignments, serving as resource teacher, co-teacher, and study lab teacher. At times, teachers are assigned to two classes within the same class period. These assignments, including the subjects and grades, may vary from year to year. Almost all of the special education teacher participants are certified as a “generalist,” meaning that they are not certified in a particular subject area, and are, therefore, unlikely to have been trained in the specific content and pedagogy of a subject. Several co-teachers described the steps they had taken to become proficient in the various content areas.

The three self-contained teacher participants were the only teachers assigned to teach the same group of students in the same classroom every day. Their students, however, function on a wide range of grade levels, and the teachers are responsible for delivering instruction in the core subjects of reading, language, math, science, and social studies, as well as vocational skills. Meeting the social and emotional needs of students in the self-contained classroom is integral to the quality of classroom instruction.

Collaboration with other professionals. Special education teachers are called on to work closely with other teachers and service providers to meet the wide variety of student needs. These may include individuals who are located on the campus, such as the nurse, or district support staff who consult with the teacher. By far, however, the most critical and challenging relationships are among co-teachers and their general education teaching partners. Sharing responsibility for a group of students, as well as space,

resources, and instructional time, requires a very sophisticated level of collaboration that far exceeds what is typically required of general education teachers. Co-teachers described many variations on sharing teaching responsibilities in the classroom, with the majority of the direct teaching carried out by the general education teacher.

Ideally, the co-teacher and general education teacher plan and present the lesson as a team. In reality, this seldom happens. Given the complex schedules and time demands of the teachers, it is difficult for teachers to have a dedicated period for collaboration. Teachers and administrators, however, have found ways to communicate more informally and to take advantage of department meetings or chance encounters to strategize. The general education teacher generally shares lesson plans electronically so that the co-teacher takes responsibility for planning modifications and accommodations. However, ensuring that the appropriate modifications are implemented successfully for each student, given the number of students and classes, can be challenging. In contrast, the general education teacher rarely teaches more than one subject or content and only occasionally teaches more than one grade level.

Planning and leading ARDs. All of the teachers carry a caseload of between five and 20 students. One of the important responsibilities of being a caseload manager is planning and leading the student's annual ARD. Teachers described the preparation needed for an ARD, noting that some ARDs require additional time if they include a behavior plan, a transition plan, or an autism supplement. Teachers who are responsible for ARDs with students in grade eight also must communicate with parents about the transition to high school. Promotion ARDs for students in grade 8 are held at the high

school campus and, as a result, require additional time in advance preparation, as well as time away from the campus for the meeting.

The amount of time needed to prepare for an ARD varied greatly among the teachers. One resource teacher said that she could be prepared in as little as 30 to 45 minutes. Most teachers, however, said that the preparation takes between an hour and a half and three hours. A self-contained teacher reported that it took at least one day to prepare for an ARD due to the number of content areas and objectives that she is required to include in the IEP. Co-teachers described the importance of gathering input from each of the students' teachers in preparation for the ARD, reviewing student progress, obtaining records, and communicating with parents. Teachers who are new to the role noted the investment of time needed to learn the ARD process in terms of both preparation and the required electronic data input. The number of new teachers who enter the profession each year makes this a significant, ongoing challenge.

Parent communication. The amount of time that teachers described as being devoted to parent communication varied widely. One teacher reported that she spent just 10 to 15 minutes per week, and a resource teacher confided that she rarely needed to communicate with parents outside the ARD meeting. In contrast, some teachers go to great lengths to stay in touch with parents, communicating daily through text, email, and phone calls. Teachers also stated that they make themselves available to parents who call, email, or drop by the teacher's classroom. One resource teacher makes home visits on the weekends in an effort to accommodate parent schedules. These teachers recognize that time is critical for parents of a middle school student, and the teachers find the most

expedient way to communicate regarding student progress, behavior, tutorials, questions, or concerns.

In addition to these informal means of communication, special education teachers are responsible for monitoring progress for the students in their caseload. Every six weeks, the teacher reviews student grades, academic, and social progress and then reports this information as a supplement to the student report card.

Meeting the social and emotional needs of students. Only rarely is the responsibility of meeting the social and emotional needs of students a particular task. More often, it is an awareness on the part of the teacher or the teacher's skill in the use of subtle strategies to guide, support, and instruct students. For example, co-teachers described strategies they employ to put their students at ease. More than one teacher described how he asks a question during the lesson, as though he needs help, knowing that some of his students need that question to be addressed.

Teachers described their strategic decisions about where to stand in the classroom, how and with whom they would interact, and when they would intervene to offer help or redirection, keeping in mind the negative connotations that special education students might sometimes carry and the role of the teacher in protecting and promoting the student's sense of well-being. One teacher meets with a small group of students during her off period to assist them in developing appropriate social skills. Another teacher described the relationship she maintains with the students in her caseload as she meets with them regularly to check on their progress.

Student assessment and progress monitoring. The most significant responsibilities related to student assessment were described by the two self-contained teachers who work with students with severe disabilities. They both described a very complex and time-consuming process in which they are required to develop assessment items unique to each student, addressing objectives in all core subjects that are tested by the state for a given grade level. Administering the one-on-one assessment and recording the student results also require a great deal of the teacher's time. When asked to estimate the time, the teacher replied that it was difficult to determine this, as both the teacher and her assistant work at home to create the assessment activities because, "There is not enough time in the day here."

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Undoubtedly, the roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers require skills and expertise unique to the special education setting that are in addition to and different from general education. Additionally, the relative importance of various skills and expertise differs from that of a general education teacher. Teacher participants in this study confirmed the wide variety of roles that special education teachers assume, the complexity of their schedules, the fact that they often perform more than one role in the same day, and the enormous responsibilities they share in providing instruction and coordinating services with other professionals. This was similarly documented by the CEC (2012b).

In addition to the demanding teaching assignments of many special education teachers, these educators also are expected to take on a significant number of

responsibilities outside their teaching duties. These responsibilities are time intensive, involve high levels of collaboration with parents and staff, and require the teacher to possess unique skills and expertise. Skills unique to the special education setting are delineated in the preparation and credentialing process outlined by the CEC (2012a) and were validated in the teacher participants' accounts of their daily responsibilities. The broad range of tasks described by the teachers also were closely aligned to those documented in the time-use studies carried out by Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010), including direct instruction, instructional support, paperwork, discipline, supervision, and collaboration.

Research Question 1

How are teacher evaluation systems used to identify effective special education teachers?

To accurately assess the validity of the teacher evaluation system, i.e., whether it is achieving its intended outcome to identify effective teachers, it was first necessary to gain a clear understanding of the components of the teacher evaluation system. It was then essential to confirm that the policies and procedures prescribed by the teacher evaluation system are being carried out consistently and with the intent with which they were designed.

Implementation of the Teacher Evaluation System

When asked to describe the typical teacher evaluation process, the teachers and appraisers both confirmed the consistent implementation of the teacher evaluation system, as participants named the following key elements: annual appraisals, standard classroom observations, multiple classroom observations, individualized feedback, and

ongoing teacher-appraiser conferences. These practices are well established on both of the campuses, leaving little doubt that the teacher evaluation system is being implemented according to its design.

Teachers and appraisers described a strong commitment to the implementation of the teacher evaluation process as it was designed. Teachers regularly experience frequent classroom observations, including both formal and informal feedback. They meet regularly with their appraisers for coaching and to monitor their progress toward professional goals. Requirements for 30-minute and 10-minute observations are consistently met, as are requirements for periodic teacher-appraiser conferences. More importantly, teacher and appraiser descriptions of the appraisal cycle and the ongoing communication between teachers and appraisers for the purpose of improved instructional practices demonstrate a commitment to the evaluation system's intended purpose, i.e., to identify effective teachers *and* support their professional growth.

Having established the fact that the teacher evaluation process makes use of research-based practices and is being implemented with fidelity to process and intent, the researcher can now turn attention to the question, "Does the teacher evaluation system accurately differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers?" Using a Likert scale of 1 to 10, five teachers rated the system very high, giving it a 7 or an 8. Only one teacher rated it below a 5. Four teachers declined to answer, including two teachers who did not feel they were familiar enough with the system to make a judgment. Among the teacher response patterns, there were no discernible differences between the two campuses; between teachers with varying assignments, i.e., resource, self-contained, and

co-teach; and between teachers with varying years of experience. Administrators responded similarly, with four administrators who rated the evaluation system between a 6 and an 8 and two who declined to answer.

Many of the teachers and administrators based their confidence in the teacher evaluation system on the instructional practices component—more specifically, the Instructional Practice Rubric. The teachers appreciate that this document has set clear expectations for instructional practice and that it delineates the criteria that must be met to achieve the “effective” or “highly effective” teacher rating. Teachers described the ways in which appraisers make use of the rubric in providing evidence based feedback and guiding them toward improved instructional practice. Administrators also confirmed their reliance and comfort with the Instructional Practices Rubric.

Participants also voiced their support for the use of multiple components and the role of student achievement in identifying effective teachers. Two administrators spoke directly with regard to student achievement, stating that the use of data was critical in the process of accurately identifying effective teachers. There were, however, varying points of view with regard to the use of student achievement data. Both teachers and administrators expressed concerns related to the use of standardized test scores, noting the inconsistencies among grade levels, the differences in learning trajectories for students with disabilities, challenges that special education students may experience related to memory and recall, the effect of classroom assignments on student outcomes, and the difficulties in measuring student achievement versus student growth. These

concerns mirror the many brought forward by a host of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

Summary of Research Question 1

The processes and tools of the teacher evaluation system employed in this district are aligned to research-based practices. They are tightly aligned to the recommendations that Weisberg et al. (2009) published in the *Widget Effect*, which admonished policymakers to design new evaluation systems that would delineate clear performance standards, make use of multiple rating options, adhere to regular norming practices, deliver frequent feedback to teachers, and align performance standards to differentiated professional development opportunities. These elements, with the exception of the use of multiple rating options, are established practices described by the participants in this study.

Research from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) informed policy by identifying effective teachers using a combination of measures. For example, they found that linking teacher observation ratings obtained from a series of classroom visits with value-added scores and student perception data resulted in a more reliable measure of effectiveness than did using a single measure. The use of multiple components is supported by research and policy, but, unfortunately, it has proven to be extremely difficult to implement.

In this district, the three components of the teacher evaluation system are instructional practices, professional expectations, and student achievement. The first component, instructional practices, is represented by the Instructional Practices Rubric

and was consistently named by almost every participant as a component in which they participate. Appraisers quickly pulled a copy of the rubric from their desk drawer and often read from its pages. There is no doubt that these criteria for effective teaching practices are regularly applied to classroom observations.

The second component, professional expectations, was named by several teachers at one middle school that employs a system for teachers to submit documentation to verify fulfillment of these expectations. Participants gave very little attention to this component. The third component, student achievement, also was rarely mentioned by the special education teachers. In the district implementation of the teacher evaluation system, it has been difficult to determine a means to measure student achievement for students with disabilities. As a result, many special education teachers are not required to participate in this third component. Consequently, the use of multiple components to accurately identify effective teachers is not fully implemented for special education teachers.

Thus, having established the elements of the teacher evaluation system and its consistent implementation, the researcher returns to the question, “Does the teacher evaluation system accurately identify effective special education teachers?” Most of the teachers and appraisers in this study believe that it does and expressed their confidence in the components of the system. It appears that the system has credibility with practitioners; they believe it works. These are, however, merely beliefs and perceptions. We can provide no empirical data to indicate that the teacher evaluation system has, in fact, accurately identified effective teachers.

Research Question 2

How do teacher evaluation systems take into account differences between general education and special education teachers?

The researcher asked both teachers and administrators to describe their experiences in implementing the teacher evaluation system. Specifically, participants were requested to describe the teacher evaluation process as it applies to special education teachers, enabling the researcher to gain insight into the challenges that teachers and appraisers face in utilizing the teacher appraisal system in the special education setting and their perceptions of how well the system accounts for the unique roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher.

Challenges in Implementing the Teacher Appraisal System

While teachers reported that they perceive that their appraisers follow the same teacher evaluation process for general education and special education teachers, their administrators admitted that they face challenges in appraising special education teachers with the teacher evaluation system and, as a result, modify the tools and processes. As one appraiser commented, “So you are trying to kind of make it [the teacher evaluation system] work where it doesn’t work, you know?” The administrators gave specific examples of the adjustments they make and explained why they are necessary, based on the requirements of the teacher appraisal process and the specific situations in which the tools and processes are not well matched to the special education setting. Appraisers find it challenging to apply the teacher evaluation process in (a) appraising co-teachers, (b) capturing the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, (c) recognizing the

importance of social and emotional needs of students with disabilities, (d) using the Instructional Practice Rubric, and (e) determining teacher ratings.

Appraising co-teachers. The difficulty in appraising co-teachers lies in the fact that co-teachers are rarely the teacher “in charge” of leading the lesson. In their role as facilitator, they typically monitor students, assist with note taking, plan and implement accommodations, assist with small groups, or circulate to help students one-on-one. These responsibilities, while critical for the success of the co-teach model, result in several challenges in applying the teacher evaluation system according to the policies set forth. First, appraisers may visit the classroom for the purpose of conducting an appraisal but find that they cannot evaluate the teacher because the special education teacher is not leading the lesson. For this reason, administrators find it necessary to notify the teachers in advance of their intent to make a classroom observation, even though observations, by policy, are intended to be unannounced. Typically, the special education teacher makes arrangements with the general education teacher to lead the lesson at the designated time of the evaluation.

A second challenge in appraising co-teachers also is related to the co-teacher’s role as facilitator. The Instructional Practice Rubric is designed to evaluate a teacher who has planned and is leading the lesson. For example, indicators *I-1: Facilitates organized, student-centered, objective-driven lessons*, *I-5: Maximizes instructional time*, and *I-9: Sets and implements discipline management procedures* cannot be evaluated if the teacher is serving in the role of facilitator. Again, this necessitates a modification on the part of the appraiser so that special education teachers are given the opportunity to

demonstrate the full range of their skills. Sadly, the value of the feedback provided to the teacher by the appraiser is greatly diminished because the teaching situation is contrived, and the authenticity of the lesson is lost. A system that was designed to support teachers through individualized feedback is impotent if the lesson delivery is a “setup.” These difficulties led four participants to voice the opinion that the teacher evaluation system is not well suited to the needs of the co-teacher.

Capturing roles and responsibilities. A critical issue with regard to teacher evaluation systems is whether they adequately capture the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher. A second issue is whether the relative importance of various roles and responsibilities are accounted for in the appraisal of the special education teacher. In commenting on the second issue, teachers gave mixed opinions. Several thought that the system matched their roles. Others, including teachers and administrators, believed that general education teachers and special education teachers were not “on the same playing field.” One administrator spoke specifically about the caseload, schedules, parent communication, paperwork, and coordinating with other staff members. He then summarized, “So all of that doesn’t fall anywhere near the appraisal system. I mean, at the most, following school policies, professional responsibilities, so it’s very limited.”

Recognizing the importance of social and emotional needs. Participants pointed to the important and often overlooked role of the special education teacher to support the social emotional development of students with disabilities. In the Instructional Practice Rubric, these responsibilities are found in *I-9: Sets and implements*

discipline management procedures and *I-10: Builds a positive and respectful classroom environment*. While these skills are critical for the success of all teachers, they often take on even greater importance in the special education setting. One example was a teacher's skill in managing discipline and creating a positive classroom environment, particularly for students with severe disabilities, autism, or behavior disorders. Another teacher highlighted the important role of the special education teacher in not only instructing, supporting, and encouraging social and emotional skills, but also in using data to monitor progress toward behavior goals.

Applying the Instructional Practice Rubric

One criteria from the Instructional Practices Rubric *I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills* was named by seven of the teachers and appraisers as being troublesome in its application to the special education classroom. Teachers and administrators agreed that they wished to engage students in work to develop higher-level thinking skills but acknowledged the challenges of defining what that means for students with disabilities and how it is best accomplished. One teacher stated, "It's going to look different in a general ed classroom," and an administrator commented that she didn't feel that it was fair to deny a higher score for a teacher, knowing that her students "aren't there yet."

Determining teacher ratings. Two administrators described situations in which they felt compelled to modify the teacher evaluation process in determining the teacher rating for a special education teacher. They provided examples in which the teacher evaluation system required the teacher to meet all of the indicators listed for a particular

criterion, but the appraiser believed that the special education teacher's role prevented him or her from having the potential to demonstrate all of the indicators. For example, *"Students track their own progress toward meeting unit objectives and annual learning goals using classroom systems"* includes the following indicators for a teacher to be rated highly effective: *"Students collaborate with the teacher to develop and invest themselves toward individual annual student learning goals"* and, *"Students articulate their annual learning goals and how achievement of those goals will be assessed."* Two appraisers expressed their belief that these indicators were unrealistic expectations for a special education teacher who teaches students with severe disabilities. As a result, the appraisers felt that the system resulted in an unfair situation and took steps to make it equitable.

The dilemma that these administrators described, however, is addressed in the district's guide to support appraisers, i.e., The Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs. The supplement provides guidance for the appraiser in evaluating teachers of students with severe disabilities, specifically in *PL-1: Develops student learning goals*: "When reviewing student learning goals, appraisers may consider severe limitations for some students with disabilities." Unfortunately, the administrators were unaware of the existence of this district document.

Summary of Research Question 2

The critical elements of the teacher evaluation system, such as annual appraisals, standard classroom observations, multiple classroom observations, individualized

feedback, and fidelity to the appraisal cycle with ongoing teacher-appraiser conferences, serve general education and special education teachers equally in many respects. There are, however, several significant concerns that were expressed by teachers and appraisers on both campuses. The modifications documented in this research study confirm survey results conducted of state and local special education directors, indicating that more than half have modified protocols to reflect the unique roles and specialized skills of the special educator (Holdheide et al., 2012).

All appraisers described modifications they make to the tools and processes of the teacher evaluation system when they are appraising special education teachers, but the need to modify the process is most urgent in appraising co-teachers. It is here that the teacher evaluation system is significantly compromised. The difficulties include scheduling the observation, applying the Instructional Practice Rubric, and providing authentic feedback. The challenges were mentioned by every appraiser and nearly every co-teacher on these two campuses. Yet, these campuses are not unique in their needs or in the number of inclusion classes they have scheduled. The challenges related to providing a fair and meaningful evaluation process for co-teachers affect a considerable number of special education teachers and is worthy of further attention.

Difficulties in applying observation protocols to evaluate co-teachers were identified by Kamens et al. (2013) with regard to determining (a) whether the special education teacher is providing direct instructional support or simply monitoring student participation or behavior; (b) whether the special education teacher is responsible only for students with disabilities or for the general education students, as well; and (c) the impact

of the general education teacher's instructional expertise and the teacher's experience and skill in implementing the co-teach model. Only the first of these three concerns was noted by the participants in this study.

Another concern for many participants was the interpretation and application of one criterion from the Instructional Practices Rubric, i.e., *I-4: Engages students in work that develops higher level thinking skills*. It was named by seven participants, including teachers and appraisers on both campuses. Ironically, the district document designed to provide guidance for appraisers, the Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students with Special Learning Needs, addresses four other criteria from the Instructional Practice Rubric but does not include I-4.

Research Question 3

How do teacher evaluation systems support the professional growth of special education teachers?

New teacher evaluation systems were designed with a dual purpose: to accurately identify effective teachers *and* to support the professional growth of teachers; the evaluation process should inform teachers of their practice and provide a means for improving their skills. Participants, including both teachers and administrators, described an environment in which continuous improvement is an expectation of all teachers and one that they embrace. Teachers conveyed a sense of responsibility for professional growth and a desire to improve their skills so that they could better meet the needs of their students. Appraisers expressed a sense of obligation to support teachers in their development.

Impact of Teacher Evaluation Process on Professional Growth

Teachers were asked to respond to the question, “How would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?” Using a Likert scale of 1 to 10, eight teachers rated the system between a 7 and a 10. These responses were extremely positive in that both experienced and novice teachers rated the system high. There were no differences between the two school sites or between teachers of different assignments. The two teachers who gave the lowest ratings are both veteran teachers.

Administrators were asked to respond to the question, “How would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?” Using a Likert scale, administrator responses ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 9, with most scores clustering near 5 or 6. Although the scores were not as positive as were the teachers’, they were positive and very consistent. Again, there were no differences between the two school sites. A pattern of responses did emerge as it related to experience. The highest ratings were given by administrators in their first year as assistant principal. The three most experienced administrators gave the three lowest ratings, a 4 and two 5s, suggesting that their years of experience have led them to feel less confident that the evaluation process results in improved teacher performance.

Factors that Contribute to Teacher Growth and Development

Teachers at all stages of their career expressed their desire to grow as professionals and to improve their teaching skills, while appraisers conveyed the belief

that it is their responsibility to support teachers in their growth. One administrator stated that the teacher evaluation system “holds us accountable to creating a plan to support the teachers,” while another said, “It’s my job to support them.” Interview transcripts provided many examples of specific ways in which teachers feel they have improved their practice, along with descriptions of the experiences that they believe have been the most helpful. In several instances, a teacher relayed a story of improved practice to the researcher; in a later interview with the teacher’s appraiser, the appraiser related the same example. Even without knowledge of the each other’s interview, they confirmed the sense that teachers and appraisers work hand in hand for improved practices. As a result of the ongoing feedback and conferences, teachers and appraisers described a coaching relationship that fosters professional growth.

Tools and Processes that Promote Growth

Teachers and appraisers described the experiences that they believe promote professional growth. Their responses are grouped in four categories: (a) individual professional development plan, (b) feedback, (c) changing curriculum expectations, and (d) common vision for effective teaching.

Individual professional development plan (IPDP). Teachers and appraisers work collaboratively to develop the IPDP, identifying professional learning goals as well as specific outcomes and sources of support. The professional development plan is a working document that the appraiser and teacher refer back to in their conferences over the course of the year. The majority of the teachers found the goal-setting process to be meaningful and were quick to name the areas they had identified for growth. Teachers

and appraisers returned to the goals throughout the year during feedback and progress conferences. The process appears to be strengthened by the fact that the teacher and the appraiser meet for a series of conferences during the year with a commitment to discuss the teacher's goals each time.

Several participants shared concerns regarding the IPDP, expressing the opinion that, for experienced teachers, it was not particularly helpful. Several administrators believed that the goal setting was useful for teachers who are ineffective or still developing, but, for those who are highly effective, it was not meaningful and might not be a good use of the teacher's time. In addition, the administrator's time could be better utilized to support teachers who need help.

Feedback. Both teachers and appraisers believe that feedback and coaching are key elements in supporting teachers to improve their skills. Although the teacher evaluation system requires two 30-minute and two 10-minute observations, the administrators on both campuses also conduct additional informal walk-throughs. The teachers described their experiences in receiving both formal and informal feedback in very positive terms. They especially appreciate the immediate, face-to-face feedback they receive and gave examples of the ways that they seek out their administrators to get a quick report on their performance. Appraisers also affirmed their belief that feedback is a key to teacher growth. When asked, "What causes teachers to become better?" one administrator simply responded, "Feedback. A lot of feedback."

One particular kind of feedback was very helpful for teachers, namely, feedback from an administrator who has experience in special education. Both novice and

experienced teachers gave concrete examples of how their teaching improved as a result of coaching they received from an administrator with special education expertise.

Teachers were deeply grateful to have an administrator who understands the special education setting and can provide feedback tailored to their needs. The usefulness and credibility of guidance provided by an experienced special education leader cannot be underestimated.

Changing curriculum expectations. In several situations, a change in curriculum, the addition of a new program, or a change in teaching assignments (content or grade level) resulted in a need for the teacher to learn a new system, new content, or new skills. These teachers included the self-contained teachers who implemented a new district curriculum, teachers who were responsible for implementing a technology-based learning program, and co-teachers who were assigned to subject areas or grades that they had not previously taught. The teacher evaluation system did not directly affect their growth in these areas, but the teachers felt satisfied that these experiences were resulting in professional growth.

Common vision for effective teaching. Frequently, teachers and administrators referred to the Instructional Practice Rubric as a guide to effective instructional strategies and a clear description of expectations. Teachers named the rubric as a tool that has helped them to improve their professional practice because it so effectively describes quality planning and instruction. They appreciated its clarity and content.

Summary of Research Question 3

The expectation that teachers will improve their teaching skills and the belief that improvement is critical for student success are foundational building blocks for any discussion of professional development. The school environment, including the teachers' intentions and the administrators' commitment and skill in supporting teachers, must exist in a climate of continuous improvement. Further, it would be impossible for a teacher evaluation system to create this environment.

Intentions, however, are not enough. The processes embedded in the teacher evaluation system, including the teacher-appraiser conferences and the ongoing feedback, ensure that teachers and appraisers are accountable. Especially critical to these processes are the goal-setting conferences, the ongoing conversations regarding progress toward professional goals, and the connection to classroom observation and feedback. As one teacher stated, "It keeps me on track, like a blueprint." When these processes are followed with fidelity, teachers find themselves in a climate that promotes their growth.

The next item to consider, then, was the quality of the feedback and coaching. Both experienced and novice teachers spoke passionately about the positive impact of having an administrator with special education experience or expertise to coach them. However, only one appraiser had experience in special education. None of the others had experience, credentials, or graduate courses in special education, and only two administrators could describe training they have received in special education. Most appraisers readily admitted that they had very little knowledge and background in special education. Even though a special education chair is a member of the administrative

teams on these campuses, participants did not provide evidence of having shared their specialized knowledge of effective teaching practices for students with disabilities. None of the appraisers provided examples of training in applying the teacher evaluation system to the appraisal of special education teachers, and none indicated that they were aware of the special education supplement created by the human capital team at the district.

These experiences are similar to others across the country. In a survey of state and local special education directors, participant responses indicated that only 12% of administrators had received training on how to implement the evaluation system when assessing special education teachers. The majority (77%) believed that assessors should have training specific to evaluating special education teachers; yet, in reality, practices seldom reflect this expectation (Holdheide et al., 2010). These concerns reflect long-standing difficulties that have been documented for more than 30 years, including those related to the frequency of principal observations, the absence of meaningful feedback, and principals' lack of knowledge regarding special education programs and unique student needs (Frudden & Manatt, 1986; Katims & Henderson, 1990; Moya & Gay, 1982).

Implications for Practice

Great time and attention have been devoted to designing improved teacher evaluation systems that accurately identify effective teachers and support professional growth of teachers in all stages of their careers. The challenge lies in finding ways to adapt our systems to meet the needs of all teachers and, more specifically, to address the complexities of the special education setting. All of the recommendations which follow

can be implemented with relative ease, using a common framework to define effective teaching and then developing appraiser guidelines to enhance processes and tools specific to special education. The suggestions require little to no investment of funds but rely on strong communication systems and ongoing professional development. Several recommendations are based on best practices that were present on the two school campuses; where appropriate, these are identified as such. Recommendations are provided in (a) support for appraisers, (b) use of observation protocols, and (c) implementation of the evaluation process, as detailed below.

Support for Appraisers

1. *The principal sets a vision and expectation that all administrators support the growth and development of the teachers they supervise, giving equal attention to general education and special education teachers.* Because the principals on these two campuses understand that quality instruction is critical for student success, they insist that each administrator provide ongoing feedback to teachers beyond what is required by the teacher evaluation system. This responsibility extends beyond simply evaluating the teacher and identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses; it involves a reflective process in which the teacher and administrator work side by side for the teacher's success.
2. *A member of the administrative team has experience and expertise in special education.* On one campus, the assistant principal has extensive experience in special education, and both campuses have a special education chairperson who serves to coach and support special education teachers. The principals have

carefully delineated duties so that the chairpersons do not conduct appraisals.

Both new and veteran teachers expressed appreciation for the guidance, expertise, and specialized knowledge that these administrators offer to them and provided specific examples of how they improved their practice as a result of this guidance.

3. *Appraisers participate in regular norming conversations.* The leadership teams on both campuses are involved in norming conversations among the evaluators, relying on one another's experience to provide valuable insight or guidance when they are faced with a dilemma related to teacher observation.
4. *Leverage the expertise of staff members who possess expertise in special education by establishing ongoing communication and support for administrators who do not have experience in special education.* School leaders might consider pairing individuals with expertise, including administrators and special education teachers, with administrators who have less knowledge and experience for informal classroom observations, followed by a debrief of expectations and suggestions. It is through these conversations that the knowledge base of effective practices in the special education classroom can be effectively enlarged.

Use of Observation Protocols

1. *Strengthen observation protocols by developing guidelines that include explicit examples of how criteria or indicators could be demonstrated by students of varying abilities.* Providing supplements to the standard observation protocols allows for a consistent implementation of the teacher evaluation system that

- supports quality practices, while also providing guidance for appraisers as they evaluate special education teachers.
2. *Strengthen observation protocols by creating a supplement that includes specific evidence-based practices for students with disabilities, i.e., instructional strategies that are direct, explicit, intensive, and engaging.* Evidence-based practices must be incorporated into the supplements for instructional protocols so that special education teachers and appraisers understand that they are cornerstones to effective instruction of students with disabilities and develop skill in their implementation. As these practices are not widely known among administrators, considerable attention must be given to the ongoing professional development needed for implementation.
 3. *Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for distributing supplements to both appraisers and teachers.* Simply writing the supplement is not sufficient if the information is not communicated to the individuals who will use it. District- and state-level leaders demonstrate their commitment to special education when they design training and provide updated documents for all employees.

Implementing the Evaluation Process

1. *Consider alternatives to observation requirements for co-teachers who are facilitating, not leading, the lesson.* Many teacher evaluation systems require one or two observations that last for 30 or 45 minutes. While it is a reasonable requirement for most teachers, it is often problematic for a co-teacher, who may only occasionally lead the lesson. A feasible alternative might be for the

appraiser to conduct a series of perhaps four to six 10- to 15-minute observations. Such an approach would provide the appraiser with ample opportunity to observe the teacher interact with students and to provide authentic feedback without creating a disruption to the natural flow of the inclusion classroom.

2. *Ensure that evidence-based strategies and content are incorporated into the teacher-appraiser conferences.* Teachers and appraisers meet over a series of several conferences during the year, beginning with a goal-setting conference, and they meet regularly for feedback after teacher observations. It is suggested that the goal-setting process and the ongoing appraiser-teacher dialog be expanded from the current focus on general instructional strategies, and instead concentrate on evidence-based practices and specific content appropriate to the teacher's assignment.
3. *Develop supplemental documents that describe instructional strategies unique to the co-teacher who acts as the facilitator.* Most appraisers and many teachers have had little or no training in the co-teach model. Documents that provide a detailed explanation of roles of both the general education and the special education teacher would provide a shared expectation of quality inclusion practices. In addition, it would provide the appraiser with criteria to guide observation and feedback conversations for improved practice of both general education and special education teachers.

One final comment with regard to the recommendations must be noted. The reform teacher evaluation systems have been designed to identify effective teachers,

using multiple measures. While a variety of measures are used across the country, the two most common measures are the use of observation protocols and the use of student achievement scores. The difficulties of incorporating measures of student progress for students with disabilities have been very challenging. As a result, many special education teachers are not evaluated on this component, making the observation protocol their primary component. In light of this fact, these recommendations, which focus primarily on observation and feedback, take on even greater importance. They serve to improve the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers by increasing the practitioners' knowledge base of best practices in special education and by providing tools specific to the special education setting.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many opportunities for further investigation in the topic of teacher evaluation reform as it is applied to special education teachers. Recommendations for future research are provided in the use of observation protocols and teacher feedback, as well as student achievement measures.

Very little research has been carried out with regard to observation protocols, inter-rater reliability, or appraiser feedback for special education teachers, particularly co-teachers. Suggestions for future research include:

1. Investigate appraiser practices across the country to determine how evaluators give feedback to co-teachers who serve in the role of facilitator.

2. Identify and analyze the observation protocols that have incorporated evidence-based strategies for students with disabilities so that these protocols may be more widely distributed.
3. Collect data on the quantity and quality of appraiser feedback for special education teachers to identify best practices.
4. Study the inter-rater reliability of observation protocols and supplements designed to meet the needs of special education teachers who serve students with disabilities.

The use of student achievement measures as a component of the teacher evaluation system has been difficult due to the challenges of applying standardized assessment policies to a student population that is widely diverse. Nevertheless, continued research may guide decision makers to identify solutions. Suggestions for future research include:

1. Consider the impact of specific accommodations in value-added models.
2. Study the relationship between value-added scores for students with disabilities and classroom-based measures.
3. Determine the differences in learning trajectories for students at the low end of the value-added growth models.
4. Determine whether state alternative assessment results can adequately measure student growth.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions for District and Campus Administrators

Who Supervise Special Education Teachers

Program Overview

- Approximately how many students with disabilities are served in your district/on your campus?
- Please provide a general description of the types of program delivery models in your district/on your campus (e.g., co-teach, self-contained, resource).

Supervision and Evaluation of Special Education Teachers

- What responsibilities do you have with regard to supervising and evaluating special education teachers?
- Please describe the evaluation process that you typically follow (e.g., observation protocols, coaching cycles, goal setting, feedback).
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very effective” and 10 being “very effective,” how would you rate the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system to differentiate between varying levels of effectiveness?
- What teacher evaluation tools or processes make it possible to accurately differentiate between varying levels of effectiveness?

Supervision and Evaluation of General Education and Special Education Teachers

- Do you use a similar process for general education and special education teachers?

- Have you ever modified the process in any way for special education teachers?
- Have you ever found it challenging to evaluate a special education teacher's effectiveness? If so, could you explain why?

Increasing Teacher Effectiveness

- With regard to the special education teachers whom you supervise, what causes them to become better teachers?
- How do you know whether they are improving?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very helpful” and 10 being “very helpful,” how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process helps teachers improve?

Supervisor Demographics

- How long have you been in your position?
- In what areas are you certified?
- In what subject areas/grade levels do you have experience teaching?
- Have you participated in professional development or training to serve as a special education administrator?

Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers

Program Overview

- Please describe your responsibilities as they relate to serving students with disabilities.
- Please describe a typical day (e.g., routines, schedules, responsibilities).

Supervision and Evaluation of Special Education Teachers

- Please describe the evaluation process that you typically experience (e.g., observation protocols, coaching cycles, goal setting, feedback).
- Are you evaluated every year? Did you participate in a goal-setting conference this year? How often are you observed? How often do you receive feedback on your teaching?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very effective” and 10 being “very effective,” how would you rate the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system to differentiate between varying levels of effectiveness?
- What aspects of the teacher evaluation process make it possible to accurately differentiate between varying levels of effectiveness?

Supervision and Evaluation of General Education and Special Education Teachers

- Does your supervisor follow the same evaluation process for general education teachers and special education teachers?
- Has your supervisor ever modified the process in any way for you, as a special education teacher?

- Does the teacher evaluation system meet the needs of both special education and general education teachers?

Increasing Teacher Effectiveness

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not very helpful” and 10 being “very helpful,” how would you describe the extent to which the teacher evaluation process with your supervisor helps you to improve as a teacher?
- Do you believe that you are continuing to become a better teacher? How do you know?
- How might the teacher evaluation process be more helpful to you in terms of your professional growth?

Teacher Demographics

- How long have you been in your position?
- In what areas are you certified?
- Did you receive your pre-service training in a traditional or alternative certification program?
- In what areas have you received specialized training related to specific student disabilities, research-based strategies, student goal setting, or other practices specific to your role as a special education teacher?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title: Measuring Teacher Effectiveness through Meaningful Evaluation: How Can Reform Models Apply to General Education *and* Special Education Teachers?

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether to participate in this research study. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to take part; the person who is performing the research will answer all of your questions. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

You have been asked to participate in a research study about teacher evaluations for special education teachers. The purpose of this study is gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators to better understand the role that teacher evaluation plays in supporting teacher effectiveness, to understand the ways in which educators approach the challenges of applying teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers, and to uncover best practices at schools that have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement for students with disabilities.

What will you to be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview with the researcher.

- Share forms or documents that are typically used in the teacher supervision and evaluation process, such as policies, blank forms, or samples reports that teachers find useful in tracking student progress.
- Allow the researcher to observe activities that teachers and administrators typically engage in for the purpose of improving teacher effectiveness.

The researcher will meet with each interview participant at the time preferred, as well as at a location that offers the most convenience. Interviews will take approximately one hour and will be audiotaped. There will be approximately 10–12 participants in each district/school site. Potential risks (i.e., physical or psychological) associated with participation in this study are unlikely and very low.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participation in this study; however, it provides you the opportunity to contribute to a body of research in the field of teacher evaluation that is specific to special education teachers and includes the voices and experiences of practitioners.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin in anyway.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?

This study is confidential. All identifying information will be separated from participant responses. Respondents will be assigned a code that the researcher will use to link them to their responses. Data from the study will be stored in a locked file. To maintain confidentiality of the data, code books and consent forms will be stored in a separate locked file. Audio recordings will be stored securely, and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for one year and then erased. In the event that a quotation or a description could be included in the final research publication that would reveal the identity of a participant, the researcher will obtain the participant's consent.

The data that results from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you, or with your participation in this study.

Whom do you contact with questions about the study?

Ann Sledge, Principal Researcher

713 582-1071 (cell)

asledge76@yahoo.com

Dr. Ruben Olivarez, Supervising Faculty

The University of Texas at Austin

rolivarez@austin.utexas.edu

Whom do you contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board; the study number is 2013-11-0049. For questions about your rights or any

dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Participation and Signature

If you agree to participate, please sign and return this form to Ann Sledge at the time of your interview. **Please keep this page for your records.**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, and possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been advised that you may ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded. _____ I do not want to be audio recorded.

Printed Name	Signature	Date
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As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX C

LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED BY THE RESEARCHER

Southwest Consolidated School District

- Board Policy: Performance Appraisal Evaluation of Teachers
- Teacher Appraisal Development System Manual 2013–2014
- Frequently Asked Questions 2013–2014
- Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations Rubric
- Effective Practices Quick Reference Guide
- Appraisal and Development Timeline
- Supplemental Instructional Practice Guide for Appraising Teachers of Students
with Special Learning Needs

Frank Luke Middle School

- Map
- Special Education Assignments
- Bell Schedule
- Administrator Walk-through Form

Maple Leaf Middle School

- Map
- Special Education Assignments
- Bell Schedule
- Staff Roster

State Academic Performance Reports

- Southwest Consolidated Performance Report 2010, 2011, 2013
- Frank Luke Middle School Performance Report 2010, 2011, 2013
- Maple Leaf Middle School Performance Report 2010, 2011, 2013

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